SPACE ADVENTURES

IMAGINATIVE TALES ON OTHER PLANETS

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by EARL REPP

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Diseases of Space

By JACKSON ROSS

IN H. G. WELLS' "War of the Worlds," spacemen arrive on Earth and spread destruction with fearsome weapons. Then suddenly they are wiped out. What killed them? Not the ingenuity of Earth men. The lethal weapon was disease—microbes native to Earth to which the fearsome invaders from space were not resistant.

Reverse the situation now. Send Earth man out into space. If he succeeds in landing safely on other planets disease will be perhaps the greatest hazard he will have to face. In seeking other planets, man will have to seek those with environments approximating Earth. On all such planets it may be expected that disease germs will exist. If the planet is not habitable to disease germs, indeed, it could not be habitable to man. If man reaches a planet where he can live, he will find such germs. And he will find that their deadliness is increased by the fact he has no more experience of resistance to them than Wells' mythical invaders had on Earth.

Let us examine man in cosmic perspective. Consider the narrow range of life conditions to which he is adapted. He lives in an atmosphere of approximately 80 per cent inert gases, principally nitrogen, and about 20 per cent oxygen. Though temperatures are possible in the universe from absolute zero (—459.6° F) up to millions of degrees, man cannot stand temperatures below freezing without warm garments and artificial heat, or much hotter than 130°. At around 170° the life proteins curdle. But these, of course, are absolute limits. Man can survive for a very long time only under much more temperate conditions.

Average temperatures in Chicago, for example, are about 74° in July. Annual rainfall is 31 or 32 inches. But increase that average temperature only about 10° for the entire year, triple the rainfall to only 100 or so inches, and you have conditions where a Caucasian man, accustomed to a temperate climate, cannot survive for very long. Increase the average temperature very much more than this and even jungle man, acclimated to a jungle life, cannot live and thrive.

As millions of GI's found out in the past war, northern men are not adapted to life in tropical rain forests. In such places as New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, they are subject to heat, strange infection, and all manner of diseases and insect pests. In many parts of Africa it is axiomatic that a white man cannot live more than five years. Yet these places, strange and distant as they may seem superficially, are actually surprisingly little different from temperate areas—if we measure both on a cosmic scale.

Man has evolved upon this Earth. He has developed resistance to thousands of different forms of microbes which once killed his ancestors. He is more at home on Earth than he can ever be on another planet without millions of years of evolution intervening there. Yet if he changes his environment only slightly—and that is what the differences between temperate and tropic zones are compared with differences between planets—he becomes susceptible to dozens of strange and horrid tropic diseases.

The climatic difference between environment on Earth and any planet of our solar system is far more in relative terms than between these two areas. As to differences other than climate, there could be no comparison. Man developed on Earth. He has been exposed to none of the hazards which might exist on other planets.

This point cannot be overemphasized. When whooping cough first reached South Sea Islands from sailing vessels, it decimated the native populations. A disease which is hardly noticeable among Caucasian adults, and is rarely serious even to Caucasian children, was utterly deadly to peoples who had had no chance to build up a resistance to it. We may assume that when whooping cough first appeared among our own ancestors it was equally deadly. We have the resistance because we descend from those few who also had resistance. If they had not, they could not have survived to pass on their seed.

During the millions of years of man's history upon Earth, who can say how many communities were wiped out by strange new diseases? A settlement of paleolithic men would grow up at some strategic point—perhaps where great herds of migrating animals would pass and repass. Such a community might number several thousand if the hunting were good enough. Then from somewhere—perhaps borne by wind, by enemies, by animals—a great plague would sweep the settlement.

Only a handful would survive. This handful would be the few who had natural resistance to the microbe or virus which had caused the plague. Slowly the community would build up again. Its members, after successive exposures, would be relatively immune to the old plague. But then a new one would come along. Again only a handful would be left. Through the ages this would be repeated countless times. We, finally, are descendants of the fit. Our ancestors survived the plagues. That is why we survive today. And that is why we resist them. Our blood carries the antibodies to fight disease, or can build them up.

From the experience of the South Sea Islands, we might deduce that whooping cough was a comparatively recent plague. We can conclude that Caucasian man became immune to it after the Polynesians' ancestors left India a few thousand years ago. Otherwise, the Polynesians would have been more resistant, since they too come in large

(*Continued on third cover*)

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The Secret of

by ED EARL REPP

Dane Cabot was just one of many slaves of the dictators, but out in space was a secret that was the key to freedom—if he found it.

"DAMN women, anyhow!"

Dark shadows of fury lay in the eyes of Dane Cabot as he throttled raw fuel into the humming rocket tubes. Leaping toward the stars with a wild burst of power the tiny space cruiser cast aside the gravity of the Earth as a dog shakes off water. Dane crouched sullenly over the controls, fingers claw-like on the accelerators. The power song of the rocket exhausts and the shrill straining of tortured girders were like cool water on his feverish nerves.

Furiously he drove on into the black depths of space. Buried somewhere in that measureless vacuum whirled the little planetoid, his goal. And in the very heart of it lay a cavern where he had found peace before, when his heart and brain were troubled beyond endurance as they were now.

An hour behind him lay Earth—and Brooke Loring. Brooke, with her laughing eyes and inviting lips. Brooke Loring, who cared not a tinker's damn for him! He knew that by the time he returned from Planetoid 88, if he ever did, she would be the wife of East Bayard — an important woman in the United Americas, mate of the man who was second in power of *The Hun-*

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Planetoid 88

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dred. Dane could go back to prison. And when he'd paid the price of assaulting a leader, he would return to Chemistry House, where he was a Superior, and fool with his acids and test tubes and take orders from The Hundred.

But at least the agony was over. There would be no more scenes like that in Biology Station One this morning. A man can stand to lose a woman. What he can't stand is being tortured with the thought of losing her. Dane had so long feared that they would take Brooke from him, that now a strain of relief tempered his grief and fury.

THEY HAD STOOD ALONE on the top floor of the Biology Station this morning, the girl's eyes shining with eagerness, Dane's dark with a brooding bitterness. He had watched Brooke go near one of the globular incubators and stare at the embryo within, her lips parted and hand clasped against her throat.

"It's wonderful, Dane!" she breathed. "To think—that one of these incubators hold the man who will be the ruler of all the Americas some day! Doesn't it take your breath away?"

Her eyes reflected the shining columns of glass globes, each with its tiny atom of pulsing life within. The pumping and bubbling of a thousand artificial hearts throbbed in the room.

"With disgust—yes," Dane muttered. "Thank God I had a woman, not a fishbowl, for a mother. I can remember when having a baby was considered something sort of sacred. Now people go to Biology Stations to look at the embryos of their future offspring like a lot of sightseers at an aquarium."

Brooke turned on him, her eyes dark and angry.

"For that matter, I was artificially born myself. Most of the great men in this country were, too. It's been proven the best way from every angle."

"I suppose I should apologize for being normally born myself," Dane grunted. "But somehow, I'm proud of it! Brooke, I'm sick of all this! Sick of the Houses of Science, The Hundred, the Vedette, the Biology Board." His voice raised, and he tossed a hand at the ranks of gleaming incubators. "I've been told what I could and couldn't do for so long that I feel like asking permission every time I take a breath. And, Brooke—I'm through with it!"

"Dane Cabot, are you crazy?" Brooke said that in a tense whisper, her glance darting nervously to where an attendant had stopped in the act of reading the dials on an incubator to stare at them. "You could be executed for what you've said. If that workman heard—!"

Dane stared belligerently at the man, and the attendant's gaze dropped. But the young leader in Chemistry House had the good judgment to lower his voice.

"Let's get out of here," he grunted. "I only brought you because it was the quietest place I could think of where we could talk. The whole reek of the place nauseates me."

Brooke let him take her arm and guide her to the elevator. But there was resentment in the set of her features and the stiffness of her slender form. As they slipped down the long silver tube, Dane stared at her.

"I meant what I said," he clipped. "One fine day I'm going to get out of all this. That day isn't far off. The Hundred have given me their last order."

"How can you talk like that? You—a Superior in Chemistry House!"

"Superior to what?" Dane's laugh was harsh. "To the unthinking drones in the labs who drowse away the years

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over test tubes and believe all the leaders tell them! What does my rank amount to? It means I take orders direct from The Hundred instead of through a stuffed shirt. But if I show signs of original thought, I'm classed as a reactionary . . . liable to be shadowed by the Vedette and executed on their testimony!"

"Even as your father and grandfather were executed before you?" Brooke asked acidly. "I should think it would be a warning to you. Or is anarchy ingrained in the Cabot blood?"

THE elevator sighed to a stop on the first floor. Dane's big hand reached out and he kept the girl from opening the door. She looked at him, frightened at the intensity in his eyes. Brooke Loring had seen pictures of Mortimer Cabot, his grandfather, and Samuel Cabot, his father, and the fanatical zeal of their features was Dane's now. At twenty-eight, Dane Cabot looked like his grandfather before him . . . a tall man, not a heavy one, with rather thin cheeks and touseled black hair. There was something very young in his face, something idealistic; and something very old in his shadowed black eyes. Looking at him, no one would have taken the chemist to be a happy man. Too often he had his hands shoved deep in his pockets, harsh lines drawing at the sides of his full lips, a frown creasing his brow.

Old Mortimer Cabot had been a fighter and a dreamer. Too much of a fighter. He was shot by a firing squad for organizing a revolution against the first Hundred back in 1956. Samuel Cabot was equally the dreamer and fighter. He lived to a ripe sixty years before he was exiled to an atmosphere-less planetoid to gasp out his life on a salt crag.

And now Dane, with the heritage of rebel Cabots in his blood, was inevitably drifting down the same tragic trail they had blazed. It was not a secret that he was on the "To Be Watched" list of the Vedette, the secret police. If Mortimer and Samuel had not both broken the law by secretly marrying the girls of their choice and having normal children by them,* Dane might have been a quiescent, studious worker under The Hundred.

It was Dane's complaint that a glass jar could not bestow much character on its offspring. For in him throbbed the love of freedom, rendered hotter by bitterness that stemmed from the things he saw every day of his life. And that bitterness was a galling flood in his heart at this moment.

His hands went down to grip Brooke by the shoulders.

"Let's stop kidding ourselves, Brooke," he said earnestly. "You know why I said I was ready to quit. I heard the news this morning. What I want to know is—are you going to go through with it?"

The girl's brown eyes fell, and she pushed back a curl that had strayed from the carefully upswept coiffure.

"I don't understand you, Dane. What —"

Deep hurt made Dane's eyes smoky.

"You understand me well enough! I want your answer right now? Are you or aren't you going to marry East Bayard?"

"It's for The Hundred to say . . . not me."

"You'd marry that arrogant snob?"

"Why not?" she flared. "What woman wouldn't be proud to be the wife of the future head of The Hundred? East Bayard is fine and strong, as well as a genius. He'll fill his father's posi-

*In this day of higher eugenics, the foetus was removed from the mother after the third month, to finish its development in an incubator.—Ed.

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tion perfectly when Loren Bayard dies."

"Sure he will!" Dane scoffed. "Just the man to rule America. He's been raised for the job. 'By Loren Bayard, out of Ann Palfrey'; that's how I think of it. Bred. Like horses, or pedigreed dogs. Mentality from old Loren himself. Physique and strength of character from his mother's third-generation ancestors. And maybe a dash of cruelty and craft from some wolf who frightened the test tube that gave him birth!"

"Just the same, he's brilliant and strong and—"

"That doesn't enter into it!" Dane snapped. "Do you love him . . . that's the point!"

"No!" Brooke admitted it with a defiant lift of her chin. "After all, what difference does it make? Love won't produce perfect children, will it? It won't be of any help in the advance of the state, will it?"

The scorn in her eyes cut Dane to the heart.

"BROOKE, you can't!" he pleaded. "Remember — that first day — when you told me that some day we'd marry, no matter what The Hundred thought about it? Even if we had to run off to some other planet . . . !"

"That's not fair," Brooke snapped. "We were so young, then. I was just seventeen, an interne in Telepathy House. You were only twenty-one yourself. You can't hold a girl to a bargain like that."

"But I'm going to! Listen to me—!" Brooke winced as his fingers dug into her shoulders. Dane's black brows knitted and his eyes held an unnatural gleam. "We'll go to Venus, Brooke! I can get work as a technician in the mines there. We'll have a home, freedom—children!"

"Children?" Brooke struck his hands off and laughed mockingly. "One endless mess and bother! And what of my figure, man? As for keeping house—No, Dane. Even if I weren't to marry East, I shouldn't care to do that. Try to understand that it's over between us. I'm pledged to East Bayard. In a few months, you'll be pledged to some girl yourself. We're all finished—do you understand?"

She opened the sliding door as she spoke the last words. The tall, heavy-shouldered man standing outside the elevator, wearing the white and gold of a member of The Hundred, must have heard her. At any rate, his arrogant features were blank with astonishment as the pair stepped from the lift.

Dane and Brooke both started. Brooke was first to break the awkward pause.

"You—startled us, East," she faltered. "We didn't expect—"

East Bayard, sub-leader of the United Americas, began to smile, his eyes warming behind their thick, pinkish glasses. His face was not handsome, the forehead starting too close to his heavy brows and his nose flat and mashed-looking.

"Looks as though I almost missed you," he remarked. "I've been hunting you since the news came out. Anson just told me you were here."

Dane snorted, jealousy burning in him like sulphur. Jeffrey Anson was the head of the Vedette.

"So you keep the Vedette even on your fiancee!" he grunted. "If I couldn't trust a woman more than that —"

Brooke whirled angrily. But East Bayard laid a hand on her arm.

"The man's entitled to a little jealousy," he chuckled. "I understand Dane rather fancied a Loring-Cabot alliance himself. Losing a girl like you

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was pretty bad luck."

"Where does luck enter into it?" Dane snapped. "Are you going to tell me the Biology Board didn't act on your orders?"

"Are you aware," the Leader breathed, "that you have just spoken treason?"

The calm superiority of him maddened Dane.. Bayard towered unsmilingly two inches above the chemist, obviously conscious of his importance and strength. His mind and body were an endorsement of the new eugenics. Broad of shoulder and large of bone, long-limbed and cleanly built, East Bayard was everything, physically that his father, shriveled old Loren, was not. His brain had the razor sharpness of his sire, however, and experience would probably make him an even greater dictator.

But his attainments were gall to Dane Cabot. A species of insanity possessed him. It was not enough that he should shout: "Sure I'm talking treason!" He had to lay hold of the scowling giant by the collar and roar into his face:

"I'm aware of this, too—that the day is coming when a man can say what he likes about political putrefaction and no one will lay a finger on him. That's how it was seventy-five years ago, and it's going to be that way again!"

Bayard took it very calmly. The back of his white-gloved hand slapped across Dane's mouth, and he turned his head quietly to summon an attendant.

Dane moved without warning. His left hand ripped the glasses from the leader's face and his right fist came up to smash into Bayard's mouth.

With a grunt, Bayard went down. He lay there with his face blood-spattered, staring unbelievingly at his attacker.

"Get up, you overgrown ward heeler!" Dane snarled. "Get up and see how much pull you've got without the other Ninety-Nine to back you!"

BROOKE was screaming and tugging at his arm, and somewhere a guard blew a whistle. Dane didn't give a damn for all the guards and whistles in New York right now.

East Bayard scrambled to his feet. He let out a queer, choked sound and rushed. He had no science, but he had tremendous strength. With arms widespread, he made for Dane.

Dane laughed and stepped in. He slugged Bayard twice with his bony fists and moved away. Bayard, staggered, wiped blood from his face and peered from under matted black brows. Then his myopic eyes found Dane again. Swinging wildly, he tore into the chemist.

Dane's dark features broke into a wicked grin. He had boxing science from his father, and it took little of it to keep out of Bayard's way. He kept punching at that battered face, cutting it, slashing it, bruising it, until the leader seemed to keep on his feet by leaning against Dane's fists.

But the pound of running footfalls was a dangerous sound around the corner. Dane feinted the big man off balance. Then his driving fist plumbed Bayard's relaxed stomach. East Bayard groaned and doubled up gasping upon the floor.

Brooke's small hand slapped Dane's cheek.

"You madman!" she cried. "They'll put you in prison for this—perhaps execute you! And you'll deserve it!"

Dane's liquor of vengeance was down to the lees, but he drew one last draught before running.

"They've got to catch me, first!" he challenged. "Tell them I've gone to talk it over with ten thousand soldiers!"

That was a reference to the legendary

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cavern of the Cabots, supposed to be the housing place of ten thousand soldiers in suspended animation, left there by old Mortimer Cabot. The "Sleeping Army" they called them. The words narrowed Brooke's eyes. But she stood silent and pale as Dane darted away and disappeared out a side door.

His small strato-cruiser was in the field beyond the building. He reached it on a dead run and plunged inside, to lock the door and snap to the controls. He flew the ship low, forestalling effectual pursuit. Now that the tumult inside him was dying, he realized the position he was in. He had assaulted a Leader, and that could mean prison or death.

Neither threat changed Dane Cabot's pulse rate. What did perturb him was the knowledge that death would write finis to his idea, so long cherished, of leading a revolution against The Hundred. Perhaps Dane was more of a dreamer than Mortimer or Samuel Cabot. He had dreamed much and done little toward bringing about the upset of the dictators. Mortimer Cabot, legend said, had formed an army of ten thousand picked fighting men, put them under suspended animation, and hidden them where seventy-five years of searching had never turned them up. Samuel Cabot had supplied great stores of armaments to the army.

Dane realized darkly how little he himself had done. But things were different now. There was no one to whom he could turn for help with his plans. The Hundred had carefully bred out of their subjects the germ of initiative. The people were in the habit of following the strongest leader, right or wrong.

Dane's thoughts were on the sleeping army as he started to drop to his home in the foothills. If anything happened to him, the ghostly troops would have the sleep of eternity. For only he—the last of the Cabots—knew the secret of their hiding place.

Dane came to a sudden decision. As he had turned to that cavern for solace so many times in the past, so he turned there now. The ship veered under his controlling hand, speeding toward the landing field where he kept his rocket ship. He spoke to no one as he landed and hurried to his private hangar. Rolling back the door, he shoved the small craft into the take-off trough. With only one backward look, he ignited the rockets and roared into the blue . . .

CHAPTER II

Last of the Cabots

WITH the need for action behind him, weariness suddenly descended on Dane like a sodden blanket. Excitement and hatred had taken their share of his strength. Setting the controls, he pulled the blinds across the ports and lay down on his bunk for a few hours sleep.

The soft ticking of the chronometer was the only sound when Dane awoke. His eyes turned sleepily upon it . . . then went wide. Twelve hours!

He stood up and stretched the kinks out of his long, hard frame. The rockets had been shut off by the automatic timing device. He strode to the controls and glanced at the direction indicator. Still on dead center.

So for another eighteen hours Dane kept the ship plowing through the purple, star-frosted void. To forestall pursuit, he forsook the usual route this time, plunging recklessly through the meteor-infested region marked in red on all space charts as "The Quicksands." Danger sprang upon him a hundred times, but Dane's hand was ever ready at the controls.

And always, when his mind was not

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busy, black thoughts came to devil him. Stubbornly he refused to realize it was all over with Brooke. He relived those young moments when they had first fallen in love. He had to smile, realizing that once he had thought it was Brooke's brilliant mind he loved. He knew enough of life today to know that when women were as beautiful as she, it was their loveliness men fell in love with, not their intellect. But Brooke Loring had both. And because she was able to think for herself, he told himself she must some day see how wrong the system was.

Then finally, the ship was sliding into the conical, black penumbra of Planetoid 88. The dead world leaped toward him. Opening up with a booming roar, the bow rockets bucked savagely against the vessel's forward drive. Dane's safety belt cut painfully into his stomach. Muscles strained as he levered himself back into the seat. His eyes searched the landscape ahead. Familiar in their gaunt barrenness, the grim snag-teeth of 88's sunless crags reached up to claw the bottom out of the ship. Gravity landed heavily on Dane's lap as he zoomed the craft out of danger.

The ship flattened off now, and the rockets' staccato explosions kept it motionless above the mountains. Dane twisted to look down, studying the frozen landscape. The planet was tiny; he could see the sharp down-curve of its horizon, scalloped with broken mountains of rock. Frowning, he searched for the crater of a mighty volcano, towering above all other landmarks. After a moment he located its familiar crag. The ship went into a long slope, as Dane pressed forward to stare.

The crater blanced on a tightrope between shadow and light. Sunlight streamed into it at an acute angle, casting weird shadows into the cone. Northward were the everlasting stretches of blazing desert; southward, the hills of granite and ice. Dane cut the fuel and sank beyond the crater's rim.

Rising swiftly all about, the craggy walls of the dead volcano seemed to tumble in upon the ship. Dane had that same feeling of repressed fear, of stark loneliness, that gripped him whenever he visited the caverns. The faint light exaggerated the hollows below his cheek-bones, deepened the cleft of his square chin. His two-day-old beard stood out like a smearing of grease paint over his jaws.

Then there was a thump against the floor. The cruiser had come to rest on the layer of glassite that roofed the caverns.

DANE came quickly to his feet. Donning helmet and space suit, he stepped out of the ship. Eighty-eight's incessant gales howled about him, making progress difficult. He leaned against the shrieking wind, skidding and stumbling over the glass until, at the pitted wall of the crater, he found the air-lock. His mailed hand released the catch-bar. He lunged into the shelter and re-closed the door. After opening the door to the caverns, he removed his suit and helmet and began a winding descent through the lava-rock tunnel.

At the door to the weird barracks, he paused, strange fears gnawing at his heart. The sepulchral quiet lay heavily upon him. The dry chill of the air brought goose-pimples to his flesh. Sternly, he clamped his jaws and turned the knob. The door flew open—and Dane froze. He had known what to expect, but even so the sight knocked the wind out of him.

Stretching away until its endless ranks were lost in blackness, a vast army of blue-clad warriors saluted him. Over each man was a glass shield like

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the cover of an old-fashioned clock. Captains stood at attention before their companies. Majors stood stiffly a few paces ahead of the captains. Top-ranking officers faced the blue-and-gold horde in stern-faced rigidness.

Two thousand white-gowned nurses had their places at the far wall. Ambulance drivers, orderlies, space-ship pilots and quartermasters flanked the fighting troops on the other side of the cavern.

One hundred men wide, one thousand men deep, Mortimer Cabot's warriors from seventy-five years in the past held the posts they had maintained for three-quarters of a century. Their rifles were at their sides. Packs were across their shoulders as if they were on the point of marching. Their brass was highly burnished and fresh polish gleamed on their shoes. A hundred-thousand sleeping soldiers!

And over it all lay silence, musty and inviolate since the men had marched to their posts and raised their hands in salute. Suddenly Dane shuddered. To break the clammy hold awe had on him, he took a deep breath and went forward.

Like a general inspecting his troops, he passed slowly down the front line of warriors. He peered into their faces, met the stern glare of their eyes. Something of the fire in those eyes entered his being. A thrill of pride shook Dane. These were indeed men from the past! Men whose set jaws and clear eyes spoke of the love of freedom. Men who had sacrificed wives and families, that they might sleep until some far day when they would be needed.

Thirty minutes had ticked through the caverns when Dane tore himself from the main room and glanced briefly into the store-room filled with munitions and antiquated rocket ships. As he finished his tour back in the barracks, he was conscious of a new exhilaration flooding him. If he had formerly been undecided as to whether to risk death by returning to Earth, there was no such indecision in him now. He had a duty to mankind and these waiting thousands. Personal danger was a factor that did not count. He had delayed too long already.

He would go back, let them jail him for a few months, and come out to begin his campaign. Execution was an improbability. He had a few influential friends and Brooke would certainly speak for him.

Dane was wrapped in warm thoughts of the battle ahead when he heard the rasp of a man's breath behind him. For a moment, shock threw its icy chains about him. Then he was whirling with every muscle taut and ready.

CHAPTER III

The Golden Man

WHAT he saw brought an angry grunt from his lips. For the fraction of a second he thought it was East Bayard who had followed him here. The man was burly, black-haired, white-and-gold clad. But a blue scar across his chin instantly marked the man for Dane. Jeffrey Anson—head of the secret police!

Dane had no time to wonder about the whys and hows of Anson's tracking him. The Vedette Chief had his gun raised for a clubbing blow and his big body was crashing in upon the rebel. Dane's shoulder went up to shield his head. The gun-butt cracked sharply against his collar-bone. Pain stunned him, and before he could fight back, Anson was bearing him to the floor.

Bulky, two-hundred-pounder though he was, Anson was lithe as a panther. One powerful knee slammed into

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Dane's stomach, flattening him. His left hand clutched Dane's throat and with his right he lifted the gun.

The Vedette leader's lips slipped back in a grin.

"Led me a merry chase through the Quicksands, Cabot!" he panted. "But you're going back in cold storage this time!"

The gun came slicing down. Dane's sinews bunched, and he moved aside just as the gun grazed his ear. Anson swore and tried to catch his balance. But the lighter man slapped the heel of his palm beneath his chin and hurled him on his back five feet away.

Anson's swart features blackened. He sat up, shifted the gun and brought the shining barrel in line with Dane's chest! The rebel heard the roar of the weapon as he ploughed forward, felt the sting of lead score across his back. Behind him there was the crash of glass, and one of the soldiers crumpled within his transparent bell.

Then for a slugging, cursing sixty seconds the two men were locked togethered, the Vedette chief fighting to bring his gun into position, Dane holding his wrist in a grip of steel, battering at his face with his free hand. Sweat oozed from Anson's dark face. The cords of his neck stretched tight under firm skin. He clawed at Dane's face, trying to gouge out his eyes. If he had intended to take his man alive a moment before, there was no such intention in his mind now.

Dane knew that he was not fighting for his own life alone. A hundred thousand fighting men watched the battle with staring eyes and would have known, had they been conscious, that it was their lives Dane Cabot was defending.

Straining, stumbling, they fought back and forth through the ranks of sleepers. Now and then a glass dome would be overturned and shiver to splinters on the stone floor. Then one more soldier would be stretched out in the sleep that knew no waking.

But the deadlock had to end. The driving power of Anson's body was not a match for desperation that hurled Dane savagely ahead. Anson's gun-wrist had been bent back to the breaking point when disaster struck without warning—and its victim was Dane. His heel struck a spot made grease-slick by a smear of blood. In a flash he was slipping to the floor. Anson shouted with triumph. Cruelly deliberate, he selected a spot on Dane's breast and sighted along the barrel of his gun.

Then something happened that Dane Cabot was not to understand for many weeks. The hammer of Anson's weapon was inching back, and Dane could see the slight wincing of his eyes as they anticipated the flash.

In the next moment the golden man was standing before the Vedette chief. His tall, thin form obscured half of Anson's body from Dane's view; but all of Anson could be seen through him, as if he had been made of thick, translucent glass. He wore a shining uniform of shimmering gold flakes. He had a strange weapon in his hand, and he spoke in a voice so sharp, so full of menace, that Dane shuddered.

"Anson! Drop your gun!"

ANSON now saw him for the first time. He started, swung the gun. Fear struck through his features, loosening his jaw. His head craned forward.

"Who—what are you?"

The golden man ignored the query.

"You won't be warned again, Anson," he repeated. "Drop it!"

Watching the Vedette chief's eyes, Dane saw them search the stranger's features. Abruptly, Anson's eyes squint-

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ed, as they had done when he was about to shoot Dane, before.

In the next moment they squeezed shut entirely, his face screwing up as a man's does when he is undergoing extreme agony. His fingers opened, quivering, to let the gun drop on the floor. Dane could see, now, the smooth hole burned in his breast, as if a two-inch drill had bored through him. The nauseating stench of scorched flesh reached his nostrils.

Jeffrey Anson slumped to the floor. The golden man pivoted swiftly, motioning Dane to rise.

With his shocked gaze on the man's face, Dane slowly got to his feet. He saw a long face with piercing amber-colored eyes. The mouth was sensitive; the features almost spiritual in their delicate molding.

The man spoke as he put his gun into a sheath.

"What madness possessed you to come here at a time like this?" he demanded. "You knew they watch you night and day!"

"But —what — I mean —who — are you?" Dane creaked.

"Never mind that! Come closer."

Dane found himself moving toward the golden man. Found himself in the grip of those hypnotic eyes as they came face to face. The whole visage of the man seemed to become hard and glittering, like polished brown granite. Dane was helpless to move.

"I have watched you for many months, and I have not been pleased with what I have seen. You have let your heart interfere with your work. You are far superior to the irresponsible drones who compose most of the American people, but you have done no more toward completing Mortimer Cabot's work than they have."

A shameful flush dyed the chemist's cheeks.

"I—know," he muttered. "They—well, it's hard to work, knowing the secret police are watching you all the time."

"It was hard for Mortimer Cabot to work, too, but he didn't let the Vedette frighten him!" Dane squirmed; then the golden-clad man went on. "There is another who is not pleased with you. Samuel Cabot, your father!"

"My father!" The words were in Dane's mouth, but they were never uttered. The tall man raised his hands and placed a forefinger against each of Dane's temples. All at once the walls of the cavern rolled back, and he seemed to be standing on an eminence at the center of a deep, round valley almost like a crater.

STEEP cliffs shot up on every side. At the bases of these cliffs were immense taluses of broken rubble; just clear of the taluses, the buildings began. They covered every square foot of the valley floor, with only narrow alleys between them. All of them were of stone, makeshift-looking affairs hastily thrown up.

Dane slowly turned to look behind him. What he saw deepened the puzzled scowl on his face. A great, brass bowl rested on stone columns fifteen feet off the ground, a series of pipes running from the bottom of it. There were a score of glass vats filled with red liquid and connected with the pipes. Then Dane saw the little group by one of the stone columns.

They numbered about ten. There were five men who resembled the golden man, clothed the same and alike translucent. There were several women, in the midst of them a tall, fair-haired girl who was smiling at Dane. And in front of them all . . . Dane's father.

"Dad!" Dane hadn't said that word

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in fifteen years, and it was almost like a sob. But Samuel Cabot, tall, hawk-nosed, white haired, appeared not to hear.

"Have you forgotten the dream of the Cabots, Dane?" he asked sadly. "We are relying on you, but so far you have failed us. Time is growing short. In a few months these cliffs will crumble, this valley fill with heaps of broken rocks, and all will be over. Only you can help us!"

"Where are you, Dad?" Dane cried aloud. "How can I help? Who are the people with you?"

"We are ready to leave this dying planet for Earth," the older Cabot went on somberly, ignoring him, "but you must pave the way for us. The Hundred would never let us land in peace. A million lives depend on you, Dane! You must organize resistance against the dictators. Prepare the factories and power-plants for mass sabotage. Be ready to destroy all munition dumps and dynamite their subways and air-bases. We will know when you are ready, and will come."

He stepped back beside the dark-haired girl.

"Good-bye, Dane!" God be with you!"

"Wait—!" Dane ran forward, his hand upraised. Then the valley faded from his view, and there was only the echoing of his voice through the caverns, mocking him. The golden man was gone too. He was alone with the sleeping army.

CHAPTER IV

Doom of the Rebel Clan

THE chill air of the caves stole into Dane Cabot's heart. Alone and frightened, he stood there. He pushed stiff fingers through his hair. His first panicky thought was that he had dreamed. Proof to the contrary lay before him. Jeffrey Anson made a very realistic corpse.

Samuel Cabot's words still echoed in his brain. "A million lives depend on you!"

Yes, but who were the golden people? Where was his father? Hadn't they left him to die on a chunk of rock in space, fifteen years before?

All at once an acute need for getting out of this hall of horrors seized Dane. He leaped over Anson's body and sprang toward the stairs. Common sense forced him to return, take Anson by the heels, and drag him up the spiral stairway. With fumbling fingers he got into his space suit and rushed out, dragging the dead man with him.

Eighty-Eight's thin atmosphere leaped upon Anson's body like a pack of wolves, cold and swift-freezing. Thus Dane solved the problem of having a decaying corpse on his hands when—and if— he returned to the cavern.

There was nothing to hold him any longer. Perhaps in the confining quarters of the rocket ship he could marshal his wild thoughts. He hurried into the cruiser, rose from the crater, and roared back into the void.

Before he had covered half the distance back to Earth, he came to the conclusion that he had not dreamed and he was not crazy. His father was alive. Where, he couldn't guess. Just what his strange admonition had meant, he did not fully realize. But he knew there existed somewhere a whole world of sub-surface activity in which he, unknowingly, was the central figure!

Dane took a load of uncertainty back to Earth with him, but he took something else, too, a challenge that like a stinging lash: *"We are counting on you, Dane!"*

Not until he was nearing the great,

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green globe that was his own world did he think of Jeffrey Anson again. It was with a grim smile that he pondered the consternation his disappearance would cause. Gnarled, gnome-like Loren Bayard had banked heavily on Anson's brains. Anson had that fox-like cunning that got results in tracking down reactionaries.

Dane looked down, measuring his distance from the sleek blue expanse of the Atlantic, shining miles below. He tilted over and dropped swiftly.

A warm feeling of satisfaction pulsed his body. With Anson out of the way, his road had one gigantic stumbling block removed from it. He wondered how long it would be before they knew he was not coming back again. At least, that was one job they could not pin on him! He foresaw a stretch in Central Detention for the beating he had given East Bayard, but, strangely, that prospect cheered him somewhat. Four or five months to map out his campaign and compile a list of possible accomplices. The time wouldn't be wasted.

Land came rushing up at him. His eyes found the ragged gray outline of New York City. Dane sloped for the landing field in the mainland foothills. With a little tug at his heart, Dane thought of Brooke down there in the city. He wondered if he must always be fighting his battle without her. Then the field shot up at him, a brown square coming out of greens and grays. Under his skillful hands the rockets coughed a last blast and went dead. Gravity repulsors commenced to throb, bearing the ship safely to earth in strong, invisible arms.

As the cement grated under his feet, Dane stood up and stepped out. Breathing deeply of the fresh, clean air, he stretched mightily. And then, sidling out of hangars, slipping from between buildings, he saw them coming . . .

Gray-uniformed policemen, each carrying a wicked-looking automatic rifle. Like gray wolves they closed in on him, the sunlight catching blue glints from their weapons. A shout broke the unnatural hush.

"Put up your hands, Cabot! You're under arrest!"

DANE thought in a stunned sort of way: "They're being damned cautious about an ordinary assault-and-battery case!"

He obeyed the order, standing tall against the shiny side of his ship. A big, red-faced officer came up to him and shoved the rifle in his stomach.

"Where's Anson?" he snapped.

Dane looked blankly at him. His stunned gaze traveled over the others, who were closing in.

"Anson?" he muttered. "What about him?"

"Where is he?" barked the officer again. "The last we heard of, he radioed back from the Quicksands that he'd picked up your trail. Where is he now?"

Dane Cabot's brown, lean features did not alter. But inside him there was a block of ice that included his stomach and heart and was spreading out with each passing second. He drew on all his self-control for the strength to reply calmly.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him."

"Ahh!" the officer spat disgustedly. "Put the cuffs on him, George. We'll see what they can do with him at Central Detention!"

That was the way Dane learned that he had already made one mistake. The mistake was forgetting that the Vedette carried trans-patial radios in their pursuit ships. So the whole world knew Anson had been closing in on the rebel when the static barrages of the Quicksands cut short his broadcast. That

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much they knew; and the murder of Jeffrey Anson, they inferred.

New York had the news in ten minutes. The rest of the world knew of Dane Cabot's capture in an hour. Newsreel cameramen and radio announcers bustled in the street before the towering red structure which housed Central Detention when the patrol car stopped before it. Curious thousands fought with policemen to get a look at the rebel as they hustled him up the steps. Ropes fenced off the grim red building. The clamor of thousands of shouting voices beat against Dane's ears.

But Dane did not hear them. His whole being was paralyzed. He was tasting the bitter gall of defeat. A single voice whispered to him, taunted him over and over until he was half mad: *"We are counting on you — we are counting on you!"*

They threw him into one of the big, frosted-glass cells. Reporters milled about him, deviling him for a story. Then policemen began to cuff him about and shout at him: "Where's Anson?" Dane kept a stolid silence, even while blood trickled from a split lip and his head hummed from a black-jack blow.

A few minutes later the crowd was driven from his cell and twelve grim, hard-faced men in civilian clothes stalked in. Dane saw the twelve-pointed gold stars on their sleeves, and his jaw went hard.

"The Vedette!" he groaned.

Marcus Baring, acting secret police head, stepped before Dane. He was an undersized, hatchet-faced man, with gaunt cheeks and small eyes as hard and black as obsidian.

"Ready to talk, Cabot?" he barked.

"I've got nothing to confess," Dane replied stubbornly. And all the time he was thinking: *Don't let them pry it out of you! Don't open your mouth even if they cut you into a thousand pieces!*

Baring's mouth twitched. He jerked a thumb.

"Take him upstairs."

At the end of the hall an elevator swallowed the thirteen of them, and they shot up forty or fifty stories. Baring led them down the hall to a plain door. He threw it open, and Mapes, a blond husky, shoved Dane inside. The prisoner took one look at the man who stood in the center of the room. Then his heart sank within him, and he knew too well what was ahead.

The man who awaited him, smiling cocksuredly, dangled a leather belt in his hand, the buckle swinging free. It was East Bayard.

"IT LOOKS like the game's up, Cabot," the big Leader said cheerfully. His lips were still puffed from the beating he had taken at Dane's hands. One eye was slightly discolored behind those thick, pinkish glasses of his. "Suppose you talk and save us all some trouble," he suggested.

"I told Baring I had nothing to say," Dane muttered. "That still stands."

Someone shrilled suddenly: "Strip him to the waist! This is time wasted."

From the corner came the old fox himself—Loren Bayard, Leader of Leaders, Master of The Hundred.

"I'm flattered!" said the rebel with a grin. "I've never rated more than a couple of Vedettes before."

Bayard stared at him without smiling. He was a man to whom humor was Quantity X. He had a sickly, twisted body that was not more than a rack of crooked bones inside his uniform. Wrinkled, white flesh covered his skull thinly. He had not a hair on his body. In the mask of lines and ugly features, his mouth was a small red hole, his eyes two burning green stones.

"Be at it!" Bayard whirled on his big son. "Why do you stand there, you

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fool? Do you expect to get anything out of him without squeezing it out?"

East stared down at him, contempt lying close to the surface of his eyes. He nodded at Mapes and Baring.

"Take off his coat and shirt."

They ripped the coat from Dane's body, and shirt and undershirt followed it. Then a belt was looped securely about his wrists and fixed to a hook above the floor. Dane's toes just reached the polished marble.

The secret policeman stook back. East Bayard took a wide-legged stance behind the prisoner. His father moved nervously in the background.

"Where is Jeffrey Anson?" East shot suddenly.

"I don't know."

The buckle whistled through the air. The sound of men catching short breaths was heard. The buckle hit flesh with a solid slap. Blood welled slowly from a rectangle printed deep on one of Dane Cabot's shoulder blades.

Bayard's big arm drew back and the belt sang again. Dane writhed, the muscles of his back twitching. His eyes on the ceiling, he prayed silently for strength to keep his secret, even if it meant only carrying it to the grave.

Again and again the buckle slashed at the helpless man's white skin.

"Where is Anson?"

Dane's teeth sank into his lip, but he made no sound. After a moment East Bayard took off his coat and stood erect in his white silk shirt, perspiration making dark rings beneath his arms. The faces of the Vedette agents grew tense with anticipation.

So for the space of two horrible minutes the belt buckle did its cruel mangling work on Dane's torn back. Blood coursed down the flesh in bright torrents. Once, oddly, Dane thought of Brooke Loring. He wondered if she knew what was happening in here. He was glad she didn't have to watch. At last Bayard stopped, breathing laboredly. Perspiration streaked his face and matted his black hair, plastering his shirt to his chest.

Marcus Baring stepped to Dane's side and tilted a flask of brandy to his lips. Dane drank of it greedily. Bayard spun him around and gripped him by the throat.

"Where is Anson?" he shouted. "Where is the cavern? Who are your confederates?"

A queer croak came from Dane's lips. The Vedette pressed forward eagerly.

"—told you—nothing—to—say!"

Bayard stepped back, his square jaw hardening. He flung the belt into a corner.

"All right, Baring," he breathed. "Bring the salt—"

Baring stepped into an anteroom and came back with a sack of salt. Bayard took it and his hand dug up a handful of white crystals. Without a word, he flung it onto Dane's quivering back.

For Dane, there was one ghastly moment of exquisite agony, and then blackness closed about him.

CHAPTER V

"Tomorrow You Die!"

WHEN Dane came to, he was lying face down on a cot, his back covered with a thick layer of some soothing jelly. A burning pain suffused his whole being. He was afraid to move for fear of bringing on worse agony.

But through his misery coursed a clear stream of triumph. They hadn't got it out of him! Maybe he was basing all his satisfaction on the dream of a man who was dead these fifteen years, and a million souls who had never lived. But he was being true to that dream. His only regret was the fear that they

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would kill him before he could help.

"The dirty whelps!" he muttered. "They'd cut off their right arms to find that cavern."

Dane's eyes swerved, as he heard someone move in the room. Then his heart gave a great bound, for it was Brooke!

She laid aside the book she was reading to hurry to his side at that first stir of movement. Going down on her knees by him, she groped for his hand. Those laughing, blue eyes of hers shimmered with tears, and her red lips trembled.

"Dane, Dane!" she sobbed, burying her face against his shoulder. "Oh, my dear, if I'd only known what they were going to do to you . . . !"

A lump moved up into Dane's throat. His heart was pumping as it had not done for many long months. He captured the girl's hand with his fingers.

It's all right, Brooke," he muttered. "Just knowing that you worry about me means a lot. You couldn't have helped anyway."

"But I could!" Brooke's head raised, "I still can help."

"Someone's been fooling you." Dane patted her hand. "The Hundred have only started. This time they're determined to stamp out us reactionaries for good. Once they learn my secret, they can safely dispose of me."

"No, Dane!" Brooke's brown curls shook. "All they want is the sleeping army. When that's destroyed, they won't be afraid of you. But while those ten thousand potential rebels are alive, the autocracy isn't safe. If you'll only tell them what they ask—"

"That's the one thing I'll never do." Dane's face froze. "Besides, how would I be saving myself if I did? They'd kill me as soon as they found the army."

"But I have their promise that they won't!" Brooke blurted. "Listen, Dane, I told you once I'd never run away with you; that I didn't love you that much. I found out these last few days that I—I love you enough even to do that!"

Remorse was in Dane's eyes as he shook his head.

"For both of our sakes, Brooke, I wish you'd said that sooner," he sighed.

"But it's not too late! East has promised to let you go if you'll only tell where the cavern is. He's willing to forget about Anson. If you'll just save yourself that way, Dane, I'll go with you wherever you ask! Tell them what they want to know. The day you're freed, we'll leave for some other world to start over again!"

Dane's eyes were on her distraught face, and his heart was sorely tempted. It was happiness she held out to him; and against it he had only forlorn hopes of eventually escaping to defeat The Hundred. But in the end he shook his head.

"I can't do it. I couldn't respect myself if I did, and neither could you. I'm sorry, Brooke. Guess I've got that rebel blood we were talking about."

Brooke stood up.

"I'm sorry, too, Dane," she said softly. Then she left.

FOR Dane Cabot, the next two weeks were a period of dreading torture and enduring it. The Vedette questioned him every three days, giving him time in between to work himself into a state of terror over what was coming next. Bamboo slivers were thrust under his nails and lighted. Patches of flesh were literally peeled from his chest. His hands were held over candle flames until the flesh charred and split.

How he held onto his sanity, he was never to understand. His sleep was horrible with nightmares. But bitter-

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est of all was the knowledge that he had failed his father. He wondered if, wherever Cabot was, he knew of it yet.

In those dark hours there were only two gleams of light: Brooke's visits, and the friendship of one of the reporters.

Tom Benchley was a man of sixty, bald, red-faced, and jovial. He alone of the journalists questioned Dane civilly. He seemed to remember that a man is innocent until proved guilty, something the rest of the world was forgetting.

He was Dane's only friend at the trial, when it was finally brought three weeks after his capture. But his orphan opinions could not sway The Hundred, who sat in grim concourse within the Hall of Justice. Two hours of deliberation sufficed to bring in a verdict of guilty.

Loren Bayard minced out upon the dais, then, and pointed a long finger at the prisoner.

"You have been found guilty of assault upon a Leader, treason against the State, and the murder of Jeffrey Anson," he recited. "Have you anything to say before sentence is passed?"

Dane looked up.

"Yes! That for unadulterated beastiality, the Spanish Inquisition had nothing upon a modern court trial as we've seen it here."

The Hundred muttered angrily, and a stir riffled the taut surface of the courtroom audience. When he said nothing more, Bayard's thin, biting tones lifted again:

"Then I sentence you to death by electrocution, to take place at dawn—*tomorrow!*"

The Hundred slowly sank back. Dane turned away. The bailiff led him into the hall at the rear of the chamber and photographers surged about, clamoring for a statement and snapping flashlight bulbs in Dane's face. Tom Benchley was there, and somehow the cigar-chewing old reporter worked in beside him and accompanied Dane and the guards down the halls.

The cell-block was upstairs. That way the whole group proceeded. They came to the jail floor and stopped before Dane's cell. The newsmen were shouting now, realizing their last chance for a story from the rebel was nearly over.

It was then that Tom Benchley raised his hands aloft.

"Easy, boys!" he shouted. "You want something to print, and here it is. Say for Cabot that he'll never burn in the chair!"

Silence swept over the noisy reporters and the frowning guards. Dane blinked, puzzled by Benchley's words.

"What are you driving at?" one of the journalists demanded.

"I mean that Cabot's going to escape." Tom Benchley nodded soberly at the crowd.

One of the guards laughed.

"Yeah? When?"

Benchley dropped his big hands into his coat pockets.

"Why, off hand," he frowned, "I'd say right about now!" Then his big hands came out of his pockets and he was holding a hand grenade in each. One powerful arm knocked Dane behind him. "Stand right where you are, or I'll blow the whole bunch of us to Kingdom Come!" he shouted. "Cabot, there's a ship on the roof. Get moving!"

DANE was too astonished to make his feet move. One of the guards started for the reporter.

"You fool, they'll burn you for this!" he roared. "Give me those grenades!"

"I'll give them to you in the belly if you come any farther," warned the red-

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faced news-hawk. He shot a glance over his shoulder. "Cabot, I told you to beat it! I can't hold them here all day. Get in that ship and make fast tracks away from Earth!"

With a start, Dane came to life. Excitement and gratitude so confused his emotions that all he could do was choke.

"You—you're all right, Benchley!" Then he darted toward the stairs.

He could hear the elderly reporter bawling threats at the guards as he sped up the stairway. Steps fell away under his flying feet by fours. He had put five flights under him when he heard two muffled explosions far below. Dane's lips stretched thin across his clenched teeth. Benchley was out of the way, now, and nothing but debris would slow down pursuit. Gratitude and wonder filled him. Who was Benchley, in reality, and why had he sacrificed his life for him?

Then, suddenly, the last flight of steps was before Dane, and he was springing free into the sunlight. In the middle of the wide, flat roof squatted a stubby little cruiser, of a type he had never seen before. But the door of it yawned invitingly. Dane sprinted across the roof.

Plunging inside the craft, he heaved the thick door solidly into its jamb and tightened the wing-nuts. Then he turned to the controls. He studied them. They were entirely unfamiliar. He saw no fuel tanks overhead, no rocket buttons. His trembling hands darted over gleaming levers, as though by touching them he could learn their purpose.

Faintly, through the ship's insulated shell, came the popping of revolvers. Dane's gaze flashed through the glass windshield. Vedette men and uniformed policemen were streaming like ants through the door, their guns flashing. Lead spattered against the glass and rang with high pings on the polished metal shell.

It came to Dane that the few moments Fate had granted him were almost at an end. Soon, heavy disruptors would be turned on the ship. He made a quick decision. Turning his back on the approaching guards, he began pulling at every lever on the switchboard.

All of them resisted his efforts. They were locked. Then Dane saw a master lever. Savagely, he wrenched at it.

That was all he knew for a while. Without a sound, the ship shot upward, and Dane landed on his head on the floor.

CHAPTER VI

Blind Flight

WAKING up with headache had become the usual thing for Dane. He had been slugged and tortured until his body ached from head to toe. His awakening in the mystery ship was no novelty. He still had his headache.

After complete consciousness came, he clambered to his feet and went to a port-hole. Looking back, he made out Earth, a rapidly shrinking green dime against the blue-black velvet of outer space.

Abruptly, Dane remembered that the ship was without a hand on the controls. Hurrying forward, he seated himself in the pilot's chair and took a long, pensive look at the complicated switchboard. A frown began between his eyes and soon his whole forehead was included.

"Whatever this ark runs on, it isn't gas, oil, or rocket fuel!" he muttered.

There were no fuel gauges, no petcocks. There was something that appeared to be a rheostat, but it was locked. In a small, glass-covered bowl,

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the directional cross-hairs hovered about a red bead. Wherever it was going, the ship was going in a straight line.

Dane was about to give it all up when he saw a scrap of paper lying on the floor. He picked it up and read what was written on it. Then he leaned back in the chair and gasped.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Good luck, Cabot," the penciled note began. "I wish I were going with you, but it's not in the cards. Remember me to Sam Cabot, when you see him. Don't worry about the controls. The ship will get where she's going without any help from you.

Tom Benchley

P.S.: If you feel yourself going screwy during the next five days, try to figure out where you're going!"

The note slid from Dane's fingers. "Remember me to Sam Cabot—*when you see him!*"

Those four words scored themselves in fire across Dane's brain. Then his father was alive! Alive—and on some world just five days away from Earth!

Dane began to stride up and down the floor, in the grip of an impatience he could hardly control. The miracle of his escape was lost on him. His every thought, now, was for the things ahead.

A series of clicks caused him to turn hurriedly to the control board. Levers were snapping this way and that. After a moment they stopped. Dane tested one or two and found them locked.

It was a helpless feeling, like being caught in a runaway elevator. Dane resolved to learn more about the ship. If he had to land the thing, he wanted a speaking acquaintance with its workings. More, however, to keep his overwrought mind occupied than for any other purpose, he commenced nosing about the cabin.

He passed a puzzled hour studying it. He turned up only one clue. In the tail of the ship, welded smoothly against the wall, was a compartment to which all the controls ran. Within that hemispherical box, he knew, lay the secret of the ship's power. Dane eyed the combination lock enviously. For a moment he toyed with it.

Then, like a boy intrigued by a toy bank, he commenced twisting the dial and listening for the fall of tumblers. Something snapped inside it. Dane shook the lock violently, yanked at it. The lock fell apart in his hands.

A startled yell broke from his lips. He threw the lock from him as cold liquid spilled over his hands. But it was a tardy decision. Clouds of sparkling, amber gas were rolling from it and choking the cabin with sweetish fumes. Dane's hands steamed with the stuff where the liquid had wet them. He took an accidental draught of the gas into his lungs.

With the first contact of the vapor on his nostrils, peace flooded Dane Cabot. There was not an ache or pain in his body. His mind was utterly at peace. To lie down and sleep seemed the most natural thing in the world. Dane did it.

HE had no inkling of how long he slept, but when he came to he felt better than he had in weeks. Save for the gnawing of hunger-pangs, his body was completely at par.

Gradually a tinkling sound broke into his drugged consciousness. He realized it was this noise, repeated over and over, that had awakened him. He sat up, where he lay on the floor, and stared about him.

Then, he saw a red light frantically glowing and ebbing over the controls, in time to the tinkling of the bell. Dane ran forward and peered through the

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windshield. On the hard surface of his eyes was mirrored the sight that he saw: A great ball rolling majestically through the heavens; a cloudy sphere ten times the size of Earth!

Dane sank into the chair. What world was this? His glance dumbly took in the fuzzy outlines of it. He could feel its terrible gravity seizing the ship. Four great stripes of brownish gas belted the body. Then Dane saw a gaping red hole on the far horizon, and suddenly he knew. This was Jupiter, the planet of Great Red Spot.

But surely this couldn't be his destination; Sweat-droplets burst out on Dane's forehead. Had the robot ship wandered? Jupiter's gravity would crush a man as surely as if he were under a hydraulic press.

The world of gas and fogs rolled nearer. Dane could see down into the ugly red crater, and the sight made his flesh crawl. The Red Spot appeared to him like a cancer on Jupiter's barren surface; as big as a continent it was, and unfathomably deep.

A voice broke through the ringing of the bell:

"The controls are now unlocked. You will land the ship yourself. The largest lever is the accelerator. Determine the use of the other levers by testing them. You will land on Io, nearest to Jupiter of the major satellites. At this time Io should be directly above The Great Red Spot."

Somewhere in the ship an electrical contact broke, and the voice died.

Dane's hands leaped to the levers. He twisted the accelerator. The motion caused the cruiser to leap ahead. Dane slacked off on it and tried the other controls. The system was simple; a few moments and he was eagerly swinging the ship toward the Red Spot.

Against the raw scarlet of the crater he made out a small moon swinging through its orbit. Dane drove the ship forward. Io swelled rapidly, until he was slowing above it and scanning, through floor-ports, a jumpled world of broken crags. Where, in that basalt jungle, Dane wondered, would life be found?

Slowly he circled the satellite. His eye finally picked out a spot of greenery. Stopping directly above it, he let the ship drop. The green spot grew into a mighty valley hemmed in by towering scarps. Now he could make out buildings that seemed to cover almost the entire valley floor. Then a hummock that rose from the middle of the city, and on the top of it—

Dane uttered a startled gasp. It was the city of his dream! The same great bowl supported by stone columns. The same ramshackle houses. The same glass vats of red liquid in the shadow of the bronze bowl. And, in an excited cluster—*the same group of people he had seen!*

HE forgot caution and dropped the ship so fast it bounced on the ground. He tore the door open and sprang out. A giant hand seemed to pick him up and hurl him twenty feet into the air. He had forgotten the reduced gravity of the tiny world. When he came down, men and women were running toward him. At their head was a spare, white-haired figure Dane could never forget.

For the next thirty seconds, neither Dane nor his father had a voice to speak with. For Dane, it was a meeting he had never dreamed possible. To Samuel Cabot, the moment meant the culmination of fifteen years of waiting.

At last the old man held him back at arms' length. His leathery cheeks were wet with tears he didn't attempt to hide.

"Fifteen years, Dane!" he mur-

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mured. "You were a boy then, but you're all man now. We're proud of you!"

"Proud!" Dane replied bitterly. "I've failed miserably. But you, Dad. They left you to die on an asteroid with a week's supply of oxygen. . . ."

"The Cabots have a guardian angel," Cabot chuckled. "Dane, meet Kris. He saved my life, and I understand he did you the same favor a short time ago."

The golden man came from the ring of onlookers. Smiling, he put his hand out in the gesture of welcome Samuel Cabot had taught the Ionians. He wore the scintillating uniform of gold scales he had worn in the cavern. The weird translucency of his skin still gave Dane a slight shudder. But the hand the Earthman took was warm and strong.

"I didn't get a chance to thank you," Dane grinned.

"It wasn't necessary," Kris shrugged. "Fortunately for all of us, I was in the cavern when you and Anson arrived, examining the antiquated rocket ships to see if they could be converted. I didn't find the answer to that, but I should say that my trip was far from wasted."

A girl's voice said petulantly.

"Kris! Are you going to keep our guest to yourself?"

Dane turned, to look into the eyes of the girl who had stood beside his father in the dream. In that moment, Brooke was far, far from his thoughts. Here was beauty to rival that of any Earthwoman.

Kris laughed.

"One would think you'd been waiting for this fellow, Margo! Careful you don't send me into one of my jealous rages! Dane, this is Margo—my fiancee, and princess of Io."

More eagerly than he had intended, Dane clasped her slim fingers in his hand. He murmured something, and kept on staring. Margo's beauty was of a quieter type than Brooke Loring's. Brooke's beauty drove men to all kinds of vainglorious escapades. Margo's would have made the same men seek her love in less showy, but more profitable, ways.

Her cool, gray eyes met Dane's and her grave lips were smiling. Blond hair was combed from a creamy forehead across which she wore a thin band of gold. Suddenly, spots of color showed in her cheeks and her glance wavered. It was that ruddy glow beneath her skin that made Dane notice that her body was not transparent, as was Kris'. And, looking about, he discovered that only a half-dozen of the men present possessed that weird characteristic.

DANE turned back to his father.

"A friend of yours sent his greetings," he said, frowning. "Do you remember Tom Benchley?"

"Tom and I graduated from Cornell together," Cabot told him. "For the last ten years, he has been one of the four men on Earth upon whom I could rely. It was Tom, then, who furnished you with the ship?"

Dane nodded. Briefly, he related the tragic last hours he had spent upon Earth.

"I've got Benchley to thank for my being here at all," he finished.

Disappointment darkened Sam Cabot's face.

"So old Tom is dead. He was a fine, courageous worker—one of the finest. Tom has known of our colony here on Io for many years. He and each of the other two had one of these little cruisers. They were to keep them safely hidden, yet always ready for a getaway, should they be forced to flee."

"But Benchley chose to save me instead of himself," Dane said glumly.

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"Those were his orders," said Cabot. "Right now you think very bitterly about your seeming failure. You mustn't, Dane. The fact is, you have been so closely watched that you had little chance to work. That is why you were never told of my whereabouts, for fear the knowledge might be tortured out of you. Yet we kept you on Earth when at any time we might have brought you here. There are few Americans left with the initiative that characterized the pioneers. You and Benchley and the other pair included the only ones we could fully rely on. And because in you flows the hot blood of the greatest rebel of them all—Mortimer Cabot—we sought to keep you on Earth to fight for our ends."

Dane smiled slowly.

"You're forgetting another great rebel, Dad. Old Sam Cabot hasn't done so badly!"

Cabot turned away with a grunt.

"He hasn't done so darned well, either. Come along. You'll need a shower and some food after five days in that animated cannon-ball."

Kris winked at the younger man, and Margo laughed softly under her breath. Between the two of them, then, Dane followed his father down the winding stone stairway from the hill-top.

CHAPTER VII

Dwellers of the Dying World

DANE'S room was on the top floor of a large, ten-story structure that housed the ruling body of Io. Kris had servants bring him clean clothes of the same type he and the other rulers wore. They consisted of a short, gold jacket, a lightweight silk shirt, and very full trousers of the same gold material. An added necessity was lead-soled shoes to prevent any more inadvertent high-jumping exhibitions.

Dane had a shower, the cool water seeming to give him back all the strength he had lost during the long voyage. While he dried himself he stood and looked out over the city.

An air of having been thrown up overnight lay over the buildings. The streets were crooked and winding. Many of the houses were in need of repair. Indeed, there were cracks in the floor and ceiling even of the House of Rulers.

Night came without warning to Io. In the thin atmosphere the sun's rays beat straight down; when the world rolled, the sun was blanked out almost instantly. There was one brief, brilliant flash of gold and red. Then night wrapped the city up in gray. And with the semi-darkness came sudden, bitter cold.

Standing at the window, Dane felt the sub-zero air sweep in at him. His cheeks tingled. His lips instantly grew stiff and blue. He was still standing in that startled attitude when Kris came into the room.

He laughed at Dane's plight.

"My fault!" he chuckled. "I forgot to tell you it grows cold rather suddenly here on Io. A moment ago our constant daytime temperature of seventy degrees existed. I think you'll find it's about sixty below zero, Fahrenheit, now!"

"I believe you!" Dane muttered. He dived into his clothing on the double-quick.

"We're dining immediately," Kris told him. "You'll join us?"

"I haven't eaten since that laughing gas of yours put me to sleep four days ago," said the Earthman grimly. "Lead away."

"I must apologize for that, too," said the tall Ionian. "Had you tampered with the controls, you would never have

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reached us. The gas was insurance against that possibility."

The dining hall was on the roof, a sort of summer-house completely enclosed by glass and heated by bowls of red crystals set about on stands. No flames or smoke came from the crystals, but they gave off plenty of warmth.

The Ionians stood up as they approached. Dane was introduced to twenty people who occupied chairs about the table. Half of the men possessed translucent skin like Kris', and Dane wondered still more about it. Only two of the men impressed him deeply at that first meeting.

Nile Vanz, warlord of Io, was a brawny, deep-chested man who wore a military man's stripes and a hero's scars. His jaw was square and undershot; his cheeckbones high; his small, black eyes deep-set. A puckered white scar crossed his chin at a 45-degree angle. Yet, that weird translucency gave him a look of softness that Dane knew was not there. He had one question to ask Dane when they were introduced:

"What kind of fighters are these Americans?"

"Excellent," Dane told him. "Perfect physical specimens, intelligent, bred to savagery."

"But their battle manners?"

"The best. They're trained from childhood. Every man is a tactician. He'd sooner die than break a rule in the book. But since they are completely devoid of initiative, this is taken for granted."

Nile Vanz' right eye twitched.

"Fine!" he rumbled the word in a bass voice that came from the bottom of his chest. "Then we'll defeat them easily! Our attack will be so different from anything they've ever seen that their own tactics will cause their downfall."

THE other man Dane especially noticed was Tolek Serj. Serj was Margo's father. "Guardian of the Intensifier," was his title; the Intensifier, Dane found out, was the bronze bowl. He found out, too, that the title was purely honorary, and that all Serj really understood was Ionian wines. He was a pouter-pigeon of a man, weighed down by medals and dressed to kill. No one took him seriously except Tolek Serj. But Dane read genuine value in his character, and instinctively liked the little man.

Midway in the meal there was a commotion down in the street. The whole party rushed to the balustrade and looked down. Dane's eyes went wide at what he saw. A mob of at least fifty was attempting to storm the door of the rulers' house!

Guards kept them at bay with short rifles. Their Ionian shouts rang unfamiliarly on Dane's ears. The crowd surged restlessly, on the point of rushing the police. Then Margo threw the window open and her voice rang out over them.

Not a word of what was said was intelligible to Dane. A member of the mob shouted back at her, and Margo replied curtly. Dane got a chilling insight into the trouble when his father muttered:

"Third time in a week! We can't put them off much longer!"

"What does it mean?" Dane demanded.

"Unless we can show them some action mighty soon—it means revolution!" jerked the elderly Earthman.

Margo turned abruptly from the window. Her delicate features, nipped by the cold, were flushed. To Sam Cabot she said hurriedly:

"They promise a revolution unless we leave for Earth tomorrow! Another section has been buried by falling rocks.

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What can I tell them?"

"Tomorrow—no! It's impossible." Cabot's hawk-nose grew red. "Tell them this: That we can leave in three days if they don't slow us up by constant bickering. That they'll have new homes on Earth in a week. But that if they kill us, they'll die right here in Good Hope Valley!"

Margo relayed the new promises. At last the mob, still grumbling, filtered back into the dingy streets from which they had come.

THEY went back to their dinner with less appetite. Margo picked distastefully at her food. Dane finally turned to her.

"This is the last livable place on your planet?" he queried.

"—and these are the last of the Ionians," the girl finished sadly. "There were eight million Ionians at one time. Falling mountains, starvation, and plagues have killed off seven-eighths of those souls. In a few weeks—days, perhaps—Good Hope Valley will be a vast graveyard, filled to the brim with stones. Io will soon have disintegrated completely."

Kris put in: "You see why we must conquer Earth. There is no other inhabitable planet, and The Hundred would certainly not hear of a settlement."

Sam Cabot was drumming on the table with his fingertips, scowling.

"There was a day when I should have died rather than take up arms against my countrymen. But that was the day of the true democracy. I tell you, Dane, that these poor people have a truer democracy than Earth has known in seventy-five years! We call Kris and Margo, Prince and Princess. That's a mere title. A vote of the people could oust them overnight. They hold elections every five years, and believe me there are no stuffed ballot boxes on Io. Every man appoints himself a guardian of the polls."

"Why haven't they elected new rulers, if they're dissatisfied?" Dane asked.

"Who would accept the job? Besides, they are inwardly certain that Margo and Kris and I, as their Triumvirate, are capable and sincere. But fear does terrible things to men and women."

"There's something I've wondered since I saw you kill Jeffery Anson," Dane said to Kris. "Why, if you have such deadly weapons, haven't you overcome Earth years ago?"

Kris winced.

"It would have been easy, of course. But the slaughter! Millions of soldiers, guilty only of following orders, cut down like cattle! Our hope has been for a bloodless revolution. Had we been able to arrange mass sabotage to paralyze every function of the nation, the people would have been easily molded to our ideas. But, now—"

Suddenly the fork Samuel Cabot was using dropped on his metal plate with a clatter. All eyes snapped to the elderly expatriate; and Dane glimpsed with cold shock his pallid skin and shaking hands. He was at his side in an instant.

"Dad! What is it?"

Cold sweat shone on Cabot's face and his lips were blue. He gulped the water Margo held to his lips. Then he fell back, whispering:

"Be—all right—a minute—!"

Dane glanced anxiously at Kris.

"One more reason we must leave, soon," grunted the Ionian. "Your father is radiation-sick. The Red Spot, you know."

Sam Cabot struggled upright and waved the worried rulers aside.

"It's all right," he smiled feebly. And

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to Dane: "I'm afraid Kris is right. I wouldn't last much longer, under the Great Red Spot. These people are immune, but Earthmen become saturated with Mu rays after a few years."

"Even we can stand it only at a distance," Nile Vanz cut in. "I guess we won't forget our trip of exploration inside that red hell very soon, eh, Kris?"

Kris smiled ruefully and held up his hands. Light from a table lamp passed through them as a warm yellow glow.

"Not with this reminder! You see, Dane, before we learned the protective power of gold, we ventured into the Red Spot in rocket ships. It is from there that we get all our power, by condensing the Mu rays in the Intensifier; but we thought perhaps we could mine the Red Spot material. Our first inkling of what was happening to us was when Zanz discovered he was looking at the sights *through* me—instead of around me! So now it's easy to know any of the three hundred who went on that trek. They call us the 'Shadow Men'."

Tolek Serj, one of the few normal men present, grunted.

"Humph! A mark of distinction! A badge of valor!"

Dane was looking at Kris while he said that. He saw the rueful light in the Ionian's eyes. Glancing at Margo, he thought he knew the reason. In her face, as she regarded her fiance, was something of the same shrinking he himself knew when he looked at the shadow men.

The dinner ended on a minor key. Everyone was glad to hurry away, and Dane, back in his room, felt more pressed down by worry than he had since he heard sentence pronounced on himself in the Hall of Justice.

IT SEEMED to Dane that he had slept but a few hours when he came wide awake. Try as he might, he could not get to sleep again. Restless, disturbed, he got up and stood at his window, staring out into the gray Ionian night. Overhead, the Red Spot was in full view, glaring angrily down upon the dying world. Jupiter, giant of the Solar System, made a vast, gaseous roof above Io, stretching away on all sides to disappear in blackness.

Dane wished with all his heart for morning. Worry lost its acid sharpness in the warm light of day. Anxiety for his father, his failure upon Earth—these were but two of his dark strains of thought. But morning was far off. Io's sidereal day was over forty-two hours long. Night had twenty-one morbid hours with which to torment the dying world.

Movement brought Dane's gaze to the winding stone stairway below him, that mounted by terraces to the top of the knoll. He leaned nearer the window, caught by the familiarity of a hurrying figure. Then his eyes lightened as full recognition came.

Dane hurriedly changed night-clothes for gold day garments. Over these he threw a heavy cape of white fur. Fur boots went on over his weighted shoes. He donned the glass-faced hood that protected against frostbite.

He overtook Margo halfway up the stairs. She turned hastily at his approach. The dim light was sufficient to show the fear that sprang into her eyes. One of her gloved hands moved, and a pistol sprang into it. Then, recognizing him, she relaxed.

"Aren't you taking a risk out here, alone?" Dane charged.

"Perhaps." The girl's voice was muffled by her mask. "But it's better than spending a sleepless night in my room. I often come up here, just to look out over the city and wish we could have brought help years ago."

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"I know the feeling." Dane replied darkly. "I've watched my own people sink into stupidity and ignorance and prayed for the power to help them."

They were climbing slowly, side by side, up the steps. The city fell away beneath them. Ahead was the looming darkness surrounding the Intensifier. There was no one at work when they stopped in silence in the shadows, but the overhead machinery throbbed and there was the dripping of liquid into a vat somewhere.

A few lights sprinkled the sleeping city. Margo extended her arm to point at a V-shaped gap in the black chain of hills across from them.

"There is the cause of tonight's trouble. Three hundred died in the landslide. A whole section was buried. That means more crowding up of the survivors, fewer hands to do the work already far too great for us."

"But think—in a few days all these terrified people can be moved away to a fertile world such as they've never seen!"

"I wish it were that easy!" Margo shook her head sadly as she said that, and Dane looked into her troubled eyes. "If we can take half of them, we shall have done well. We haven't the transport ships to carry over five-hundred thousand. Night and day, for two years, we've been laboring to build them. But we were starting from almost nothing. Our great ship factories were across the hills, and they're buried now. Buried with the three hundred transports we had completed. All we can do is take the people in two loads, hoping the second is still alive when we return."

DANE found no words to console her. But a warm sympathy drew him close to the girl. Sympathy—and something stronger. Something that made him long to comfort and protect her. Brooke had never aroused that deep, poignant yearning. And Dane understood why; he and Brooke had so little in common. He and Margo had had the same heartbreaks, the same trials.

Rather suddenly, Dane remembered Kris. Staring off into the darkness, he murmured:

"You and Kris, I suppose, will be married when the colony is established on Earth?"

Margo's reply was so delayed that Dane glanced quickly at her. The girl's eyes avoided him.

"Yes, I—I suppose so," she said at last. "Father loves Kris like a son. He wanted us to marry before we left. But Kris agreed with me that it was better to wait."

Dane recalled the look she had given Kris at dinner. Admiring . . . yet fearful.

In the next moment both of them were turning swiftly, as a foot rasped in the gravel. Apprehension chilled Dane. Kris had stepped out of the shadows behind them. His face was dark with fury, and his hand rested on his gun.

"Margo!" he snapped. "Why aren't you in your room?"

"Why should I be, Kris?" the girl countered. "I couldn't sleep. Dane came out because he couldn't sleep either."

Kris' thin features were sharp with distrust. Sarcasm whetted his words razor-sharp.

"Convenient! But I couldn't sleep because I saw the two of you leave together. So here *I* am. Is it your Earth-custom, Cabot, to try to steal the love . . . "

"Cut it out!" Dane cracked out the words and stepped close to the Ionian. "It happened just as Margo said. I'm

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sorry if you think there's anything wrong. But I'm not apologizing for something of which I'm not guilty."

"We have strict customs on Io," Kris bit out. "Stricter than yours, it seems. If a man and woman leave for a shadowy trysting-place in the middle of the night, it usually means one thing—"

Dane's hand leaped up to seize the other by the throat. Kris darted back, pulling his disruptor in the same swift motion.

Without warning, a blinding spoke of light speared down from the night sky, illuminating the trio in a circle of brilliance. Dane's hand fell away. Kris lowered the gun. Rockets barked brokenly, and a long, silver shape began to drop.

In the next moment Margo was running back, screaming.

"Dane—Kris—an Earth-ship! *Io is being attacked!*"

CHAPTER VIII

Exodus

THE stark horror of that moment would never be forgotten by the three who watched a gleaming shell come silently gliding from the night. Against the Red Spot, it was limned like a giant shark darting to the attack. They could not guess how many more hundreds of ships had crossed the void with this first of a blood-hungry host.

Kris had his gun raised to fire when Dane's fingers clamped on his arm.

"Wait!" he cried. "It's not a fighting ship—it's a cruiser. She's going to land . . . not bomb us!"

A moment more and Dane's words were shown to be true. Lowering silently on invisible gravity repulsor beams, the craft settled beside Dane's little cruiser. No word, not a breath, broke the stillness as an air-lock hissed and the door slowly swung open. In the white glare of the landing lights, a girl stepped out and brushed her hand wearily across her forehead.

Dane frowned; then gasped.

"Brooke!"

The girl looked up. As she did so, her features, strained and weary, but lovely none the less, were illuminated. Dane experienced again that tug at his heart that Brooke's presence always called up.

Across the ground she came running to him, her arms outstretched.

"Dane!" The word was a choked cry.

Dane took the sobbing girl into his arms, deeply moved.

"What does it mean, Brooke? How did you find me? Why did you come?"

"Why did I come?" Brooke echoed. Her eyes searched his face. "Don't you remember I told you I'd go anywhere with you? But you escaped and didn't give me a chance. It's been ghastly without you, Dane. Not knowing whether you were alive or dead . . . "

"But how did you know where to come?" Margo and Kris had come closer to stare curiously.

"Tom Benchley left charts behind him, and I was the first to find them. I knew the Vedette would ransack his place, after he died, but I beat them to it. I was afraid he might have papers that would help them find you. He did, Dane. Charts of the whole trip out here!"

"Has the Vedette seen them?" Kris cut in.

Brooke's brown curls shook emphatically.

"I got everything out before they came. And I left immediately." Impulsively, her face tipped up to Dane's. "Oh, Dane—let's never be apart again for a minute!"

"No. No, of course we won't."

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Dane's response was automatic. Inwardly, he was the prey of conflicting emotions. Resentment at Brooke's former treatment of him made him hold back somewhat. But there was the knowledge that she had deserted the world she loved, that she had left East Bayard for him. Those things crowded old hurts out of his mind. His arms tightened about her.

Suddenly he started.

"You're shaking, Brooke! Good heavens, I forgot you aren't dressed for this cold. Here—"

He had his own coat off in a minute and threw it about her. Then he hurried her off down the hill toward the Rulers' House. Margo followed quickly, solicitous of her unexpected guest's wants. Last to come was Kris, a frowning and a puzzled man.

JO ROLLED, and again a small, sickly white sun bounced above the jagged scraps. The new day was filled with plans, labors, fears. Samuel Cabot gave out word that the draft system would be used in selecting the first passenger list. Persons under the age of three Jovian years—thirty-six Earthly years—were the first to go. If there were room for more, they would be selected for their youth.

These five-hundred thousand would be carried in a hundred huge transports, approximately three thousand to the ship. Fifty thousand fighting men would man the ten great warships. From the edge of the huge square in the middle of the city, Dane watched the soldiers load the fighting craft. Nile Vanz strode about, shouting orders. He kept a staff of twenty-five orderlies on the jump every minute. And he got results. The warships' holds filled rapidly with food and battle supplies, with an astonishing lack of confusion.

Afterward, Dane went up on the knoll with his father and Brooke. Tolek Serj strutted through the intensifying plant, pompous and important. Dane had not seen Margo all day. He found her absence created a depression in him that even Brooke's vivacity could not erase entirely. Sam Cabot took them then through the plant and explained the work that was being done.

"Practically our only form of power comes from Red Spot concentrate. Without enough concentrate, our ships might easily be marooned in space forever. Hence, this fuss and bustle to cram the holds full of crystals."

Brooke's eyes shone with interest.

"How superior to our Earthly ships!" she marveled. "I suppose your guns are equally efficient?"

"Easily. If we are driven to it, we can annihilate all of New York in a few hours."

"When will we be leaving to attack?"

"I thought, before, the day after tomorrow. But Nile Vanz' tremendous capacity for organization makes me think we may be able to leave by noon tomorrow! That is, the warships alone, first. The transport-fleet will follow in a day or so."

Brooke regarded the fiery red vats with distaste.

"If only The Hundred will listen to reason! I should hate to see all those men and women butchered . . . "

"So should we all," Cabot said crisply. "But if Loren Bayard won't give up without a struggle—the blood will be on his hands, not ours."

Through that day and half the night the work went on. Six hours from

*This concentrate yields the deadliest explosive ever seen, a most savage destructive ray, and an ultra-efficient magnetic material. A charge of concentrate in stern and bow of a space ship creates a column of disturbed ionization extending in any direction the pilot chooses to send it. Up or down this column the ship climbs by a sort of magnetization.—Ed.

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dawn, Samuel Cabot called a halt.

"Everything is ready," he announced. "We will rest until ten, and at noon we leave. Try to sleep, everyone. God knows we shall need all our faculties for the struggle ahead!"

But Cabot's plea was vain. With such a moment only a few hours off, who on Io could hope to sleep? Hours ahead of time, they were milling about the square.

Nile Vanz got his soldiers into the ten fighting craft somehow. Ships' crews stood at their posts awaiting the order to take off. Vanz portioned the rulers off into different ships.

"We can't risk losing all our leaders in the destruction of one ship," he explained. "Tolek, you and Samuel will command the *Valiant*. I'll take Kris and young Cabot with me." He divided the rest into teams.

It was almost the last move before their departure. Margo and Kris spoke over the amplifiers to their people. Then the shining belly of the *Orsis* swallowed them and they reappeared behind the port of the flagship. Dane tried to think that it was the departure that made his heart light. But actually he knew it was that he and Margo would be in the same ship. Crewmen scrambled up after them and threw off lines. They hurried forward to the top deck as bells rang up and down the ship. Standing against the thick glass window, they looked out upon the people far below, a strangely quiet crowd. From ship to ship flashed the ready-signal. In the bow of the *Valiant*, Serj and Sam Cabot waved.

And now all sounds were hushed within the *Orsis*. A trembling passed down its sleek length. Slowly, silently, gathering speed, the warship rose from the square. The city dropped away. One by one, the other nine ships arched into the sky. A moment later, Io was a tiny speck in the stern ports.

FOR an hour the fleet was fighting the persistent gravity of Jupiter. As the drag was shaken off, the fighting craft hurled themselves forward, faster by the second. Silent as silver needles piercing space, they shot for Planetoid 88. It had been decided that the sleeping army would be picked up on the way. While the men's equipment was old-fashioned, it would do until more modern weapons could be provided. An army of occupation was a necessity, and the Earth-soldiers were best suited for such duty.

Two sleeping-periods passed. The *Orsis* churned on. Margo, Kris, Brooke and Dane were on the forward observation deck when the first inkling of disaster threatened, like the tip of a black wing passing over the ship. Nile Vanz stamped in, his seamed, iron-jawed visage full of repressed fury.

"Trouble already!" he barked. "I'll grill every half-witted fool in this hulk until I find the guilty one!"

The four looked at each other.

"What's wrong?" Margo asked hurriedly. "Sabotage?"

"You might call it that. Come along."

Puzzling over his meaning, they followed him. Not a word would Vanz speak until they reached the radio room on the top deck. Here he flung the door open and stood aside for them to enter.

Margo had hardly passed through the door when she shrank back with a cry. Over her shoulder Dane saw something that set his lips in a gray line. Blood was spattered on the near wall in scarlet gouts. On the floor, the top of his head shot away, lay the radio operator!

Vanz stalked inside. He yanked a coil from the mass of transmission equipment and let it lie on his upturned palm.

"Five kilobars wave-length," he snapped. "That's not Io's length. It's

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Earth's."

"The Hundred—!" Kris gasped.

"Someone's given them the warning! I wonder who!" Vanz said acidly.

As if by signal, the eyes of all turned upon Brooke. The girl started.

"You—oh, you're wrong!" she cried. "Dane, I swear I know no more of this than you! Haven't I been with you almost every minute?"

Uncertainty claimed Dane. The others watched him intently. Doubt lay close to the surface of his troubled eyes. More softly, Brooke pursued:

"Didn't I risk my life to come to you, Dane? Would I have done that if I hadn't really believed in you?"

Dane couldn't meet her imploring eyes. Common-sense told him that Brooke was the only one who would have done it. But a stronger urge in him was to believe her. Finally he looked up at Nile Vanz.

"I'll vouch for her," he said levelly. "For one thing, I don't think a woman of Earth would know how to run an Ionian transmitter. And besides I—well, I just choose to believe her," he ended lamely.

"I'll hold you to that." Vanz growled. "In the meantime, we must all keep our eyes and ears open. Keep quiet about this. Perhaps the murderer will try another coup. Then we'll grab him."

When the others had gone out, Brooke pulled Dane's face down to hers and pressed her lips against his. Into his ear she whispered:

"I knew you'd believe me. Dane!"

Dane fumbled for an answer. His reply might have been easier had he not seen Margo glance back over his shoulder at them. Her eyes dropped instantly, but a darkness had flowed into them, and the darkness was one of hurt. Tight-lipped, he disengaged Brooke's arms. They fell in behind the other pair. And Dane Cabot was wondering when the old spark had died.

Vanz took Kris to the bridge with him to confer on some matter. Brooke went to her room to rest, and Dane entered the smoking room for a cigarette.

It was just ten seconds after he lit the match that tragedy struck.

CHAPTER IX

In the Cavern of the Dead

OUT of the violet immensity, silent as marauding wolves, a swarm of tiny ships leaped upon the fleet! Like silver sparrow-hawks, they were, splitting into ten squadrons of a dozen ships each and diving upon the ten gigantic war-craft. Dane shot to his feet as alarm bells clamored all over the ship. Through the window he saw the reason for it.

Around the *Orsis* swarmed a dozen swift pursuit ships. While he watched, a crackling blue ray stabbed from one of the flagship's gun-stations and an Earth-ship exploded into metallic fragments. But eleven angry hornets remained to put their deadly stingers into the clumsy warship.

Dane raced from the smoking room and plowed through milling soldiers to make his way to the bridge. Nile Vanz's booming voice seemed to bulge the walls of the cabin as he approached. Dane entered to find him barking by turns into a dozen microphones. Lights flashed on the switchboard as officers throughout the ship sought to get touch with him.

Kris was at the controls. The chief gunner, with eight television pictures shimmering before him, stabbed frantically at buttons as the darting American ships crossed his sights.

The warlord shot a blazing glance at Dane.

"Why didn't I guess!" he roared.

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"Whoever used the radio told these damned space-wolves when we'd pass this spot! It's Johnny-hold-your-breath now. They're twelve to one and every ship a threat. Take some of these calls, Cabot."

Dane sprang to the job. Some of the requests he couldn't answer, but many of them he took off the perspiring commander's shoulders. His thoughts went often to the lumbering *Valiant*, wallowing helplessly while its swifter enemies dived upon it. His father and Margo's father were in the ship. Dane fervently hoped that the *Valiant* was captained by as capable a man as Nile Vanz.

Suddenly the *Orsis* seemed to stagger. A hollow boom rang through the bridge. The chief gunner whirled from his screens.

"My God, sir! We're hit!"

Vanz' brown granite features showed no emotion. He grabbed a microphone.

"Wark! What's the extent of damage?"

"Bad, Commander!" The answer crackled back. "Outer shell ripped forty feet in Section One, and I think inner shell cracking in forward observation room. . . ."

"Then lock all safety doors of top-deck. If the compression shell gives we'll be gutted!"

"Wait!" Dane shot to his feet. "Princess Margo was going to the observation room the last time I saw her."

The Warlord's eyes winced, but he shook his head doggedly.

"Let's hope she's not there now. We can't risk waiting to find out!"

Kris' fingers clamped on the older man's forearm.

"She'll die in there!" he croaked. "You can't—we've got to get her—"

Vanz slammed Kris back into his seat, bellowing angrily.

"Get on those controls! Are you trying to kill us all?"

White and shaking, Kris took up his job of evading the Earth-craft.

Dane was standing in the doorway when Vanz turned back.

"Give me thirty seconds" he clipped. "If she's in the room, maybe I can get her into the hall before the shell splits."

Vanz shook his head stubbornly. But Dane had already turned to run. The last thing he heard was the commander shouting.

"Dammit all, anyway! Hold that order thirty seconds, Wark!"

DANE bounced the elevator against its spring bumpers on the top deck, onto the landing and his long legs pushed him down the hall. In his ears were the grinding of twisted girders, the hiss of escaping pressure. The observation room door was open and he lurched through. Behind, he heard the crash of a closing safety door.

Among the overturned tables and chairs he at first saw nothing. But a growing hiss drew his gaze to the ceiling, where light shone through a dozen thread-like cracks. Then a slim ankle, protruding past an upset table, sent him hurrying forward.

Margo was just sitting up when he bent down beside her. Her blond hair was disarranged, and a cut was bleeding on her cheek. Her lips barely moved.

"What happened?"

"We've been hit! They've cut off this deck to save the ship. The ceiling's going fast."

Margo's eyes turned to look upward, and just then steel screeched. Across the polished steel shell ran a long crack. Pressure left the room with a screaming wail. For the two crouching there on the floor, it was as though their bodies were suddenly inflated. Their eyes protruded like the eyes of frogs. Their lungs expanded. Arms, legs, and fingers puffed up to twice their normal

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size. Blood gushed from Dane's nostrils, and his tongue swelled until it nearly strangled him.

In arms that were elephantine and weak, he scooped up the moaning girl. Staggering across the floor, he bumped into furniture that his swimming vision failed to register. Dane knew that in another ten seconds his eyes would pop out like corks from an overcharged bottle.

The door loomed ahead of him, a weaving black oblong. Dane fell to his knees as they went through. Then he was crawling back, pulling the heavy steel door closed behind him. It thundered into its frame. Dane had only tightened two of the wing-nuts when a reverberating boom shook the deck and the door bulged outward.

The gods were in a tolerant mood, for the two bolts held. Dane got the others tightened and then crawled down and opened the pressure door. For a moment he could only sit back against the wall and feel the growing pressure soothe his horribly distended limbs. His eyes stopped their throbbing, and blood ceased to jet from his nostrils.

Margo was on her knees where he had left her. Her thin cry came feebly to Dane.

"Dane! Dane! where are you?"

Dane stumbled to her side. He went down on his knees beside her.

"Right here," he whispered. "It's all right, now. The door's going to hold."

"I was afraid—that you were dead!" Margo stammered. She seemed trying to hold her emotions by main force, but suddenly the flimsy wall of propriety fell and her arms went up to slide about his neck. "Oh, Dane—I didn't want to live if you were dead!"

Dane's fingers sank into the soft flesh of her shoulders.

"You don't mean that, Margo!" he said sternly. "There's Kris—you love him . . ."

"Oh, I wish I did! But I—I can't! That night on the knoll, I knew I never could love him. I tried not to love you. But, Dane—I do!"

Dane's arms brought the girl against him. Her lips were warm and soft, and Dane's own lips pressed them crushingly. Then at last, breathless, he released her. Tears shone in Margo's eyes.

"What can we do?" she whispered. "There's Kris and Brooke. You don't love her, Dane—I saw you—in the radio room, this morning—"

The Earthman's answer was to kiss her again, a hard, unyielding kiss that only ended when a bell broke the hush. The sound recalled Dane to all the grim reality around them. He held Margo back and helped her to her feet.

"For our own good, Margo—for everyone's good—we've got to forget this," he said miserably. "You and I were born on wrong sides of the universe. No need to make others suffer for our own bad luck. Kris is mad about you, and I think Brooke loves me. Our happiness would have no foundation if it were built on their misery."

Margo ventured a smile that went poorly with the hurt in her eyes.

"I know. But they can't keep us from remembering!"

Dane would not trust himself to be with her any longer. He helped her into the elevator, and when it reached the main deck he hurried off without looking back.

THE clamor in the control room was less when Dane reached it. Nile Vanz shot a squinting look at his bloody shirt and white face.

"Well?" he jerked.

Dane looked past him at Kris. He smiled reassuringly.

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"She's all right!" he announced. "What's happened outside?"

"Got them on the run!" Vanz grinned wolfishly. "Look at them!"

Dane stared, and the hard set of his square jaw relaxed.

Reminds me of the old Indian fights!" he chuckled. "With the redskins galloping around the wagon train and getting themselves shot down."

"Got the idea from stories Sam Cabot told me," said the Warlord. "Those pioneers of yours must have known how to fight, too."

Dane looked long and with satisfaction. Vanz had brought his ten-ship fleet into a circular formation, exactly like some beleaguered wagon train ringing-up on the prairies. For a pursuit ship to venture inside that ring brought instant, blazing death. A score of them had tried it and been cut down mercilessly. With disruptor-guns blazing incessantly on the outside of the ring, as well as above and below, the Earthcraft could attack only on the upper and lower quarters. And a warship had but to rock gently to bring her guns to bear on ships trying this.

Of the hundred and twenty savage little pursuits that had come rushing to the kill, thirty remained. Their cannons, pitifully futile now, kept roaring and launching steel-jacketed explosive bombs. In all, only four of these bombs had found targets. One was on the *Orsis*, and of the other three, one alone had destroyed its target. Five thousand men had been lost to the rebels, but no leaders.

At last the attackers drew off. Vanz immediately gave the order to follow. His ships were faster, if more unwieldly. But on a rocket ship's tail, they could keep her in the sights long enough to turn the shining space vessel into a tear-drop of melted steel. Less than an hour after Loren Bayard's vaunted wolves of space attacked, there was not one left to slink back in defeat.

Nile Vanz switched off his microphones, wiped his sweaty palms on a wrinkled handkerchief, and frowned at Kris.

"Resume your former course," he clipped. "Steady as she goes!"

Dane purposely avoided Margo from that time until they raised Eighty-Eight in their fore-ports. He was in the landing party Vanz appointed. The nine Ionian ships found silent resting places within the crater.

A hundred men from each ship emerged on the glass shell, cumbersome in space-suits. Dane led the way to the air-lock. There he was joined by his father. Sam Cabot slapped him on the back, exclaiming something that the helmets muffled. But Dane knew it was his congratulations on the rescue of Princess Margo.

The Cabots headed the column of men that trooped into the caverns. Once again, on the threshold of the barracks, that icy feeling of apprehension crept over Dane. From the white faces about him, he knew that more than one man shared his sensations. Only the older Cabot kept his slight, anticipatory smile.

"A three-quarter century sleep about to end!" he murmured.

He threw the door open—and staggered back. The cry he uttered froze the very heart of Dane.

CHAPTER X

The Man from Hell

OVER his shoulder Dane gaped at a scene of blackest horror. The sleeping army still occupied the cavern; but to a soldier, to a nurse, to the last orderly, they had been destroyed.

They lay in heaps, as farmers gather

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corn into stacks. And every pile was a black, shriveled mass of burned flesh. Broken glass lay four inches deep on the floor. Not a shield was unbroken. The nurses lay in a pitiful line along the stone wall. Through the heart of each one a bullet had been fired.

"God in heaven!" Samuel Cabot said that and slumped against the wall. Dane tore himself from the sight of carnage and caught his father just in time to keep him from falling. Cabot's flesh was a sweaty green, and he was laboring for breath.

Nile Vanz brushed past Dane.

"Lay him on the floor," he grunted. "Hold his feet higher than his head. Damn those Mu rays!"

When Dane had his father on the floor and was briskly massaging his wrists, the warlord whirled angrily on the crowding soldiers behind him.

"Back!" he roared. "What needs to be done we can do. There's no need for a bunch of gaping hyenas like you! Be at your posts and ready to leave in five minutes."

The old rebel was longer in coming around this time. It was plain to his companions that he had not left Io a day too soon, and that he had a long period of convalescence ahead of him. But the question was whether he could weather the tremendous fight ahead.

Finally he was on his feet again and staring bitterly into the cavern.

"Murderers! Fiends!" he croaked. "Loren Bayard, you'll pay for this with your own life's blood!"

Vanz laid a big hand on his shoulder.

"A bitter pill to swallow, but one we've got to take," he growled. "I'm wondering how they found the place . . ."

Dane looked sharply at him.

"If you mean Brooke Loring, I haven't so much as mentioned the sleeping army to her since she landed on Io."

"Benchley might have left papers describing the location."

"Brooke said she found them and destroyed them all."

Vanz fingered his stubbled chin.

"Uh-huh," he murmured.

An angry flush rushed to Dane's neck and ears. But Vanz turned away without giving him a chance to argue.

Cabot spoke broodingly again.

"This is a blow we'll be fifty years recovering from. Those men were to be the nucleus of the new America I've dreamed of. The milksops under the dictators—what kind of man-stuff are they to foster a fighting nation!"

"You're being a little hard on them," Dane countered. "They seem weak and vacillating, but in reality I think there's some solid stuff in them. They've taken orders so long that to them initiative is something The Hundred possess and they aren't allowed to mention. When they're under our rule, we'll make them or kill them. Throw them on their own: give 'em farms to cultivate, lathes to run, cities to build—they'll assay high in fighting spirit, Dad! They'll be so damned glad to be men again that in a few years every man will want to run for President!"

"I hope you're right." Cabot shook a dubious head. "At the best, we can count ourselves out a very valuable fighting force. We needed them to keep martial law after the overthrow of the dictators. I don't know how the Ionians will work out."

Vanz took him by the arm and turned him back to the ships.

"My people will try, you can count on that," he smiled. "Let's worry about an army of occupation when we've won our fight!"

THE fleet silently rose from the crater of the dead and sped on to-

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ward Earth. Within twenty-four hours the cry went ringing through the *Orsis*.

"Planet on the starboard quarter!"

The news brought sudden tension that was like an electric charge to the flagship. Nile Vanz called Dane, Kris and Margo to the bridge for a television consultation with the rest of his fleet. He called the *Valiant*, and Samuel Cabot's long face appeared in the screen.

"Earth has been sighted!" announced Vanz. "It is time to make our plans. I thought of attacking New York, as the seat of The Hundred. Have you any objections to that?"

"None. I'll leave the strategy entirely to you. But I have one suggestion to make. Strike without warning and strike hard! Slaughter every battalion they throw against us. For only in that way can we keep the dictators from slipping out of our grasp."

"Brutal," Vanz said reluctantly. "But, of course, necessary."

"There's no other way! If they escape New York, they may turn the whole nation into a fighting unit."

Dane suddenly cut in:

"Wait a minute, Vanz—that gas you put me to sleep with in the little cruiser . . . is that difficult to make in quantities?"

Vanz looked at him queerly.

"A very simple derivative of Red Spot concentrate. In fact, our ships have given off tons of it since we left Io! It is the main exhaust gas of the impulsors that run the ships."

"How much of it could we capture in, say, six hours?"

"If we kept both stern and forward impulsors running full tilt, so that we would stand still, I should reckon several tons. Why?"

"Several tons — listen, Vanz — you want a bloodless victory. I think I know how you can get it!"

Vanz grunted: "Just a minute." He fingered some switches. In a moment he was in communication with every ship. Eight more commanders came into the group. The warlord turned back to Dane, a hard glint in his eyes. "Now, then . . .!"

HALF a million miles away, in New York, lights burned in a room high in Government House. Night lay heavily upon the city, but there were ten who did not sleep. For twenty-four hours, Loren Bayard, East Bayard, and eight of The Hundred had listened wearily to the crashing of static from a loudspeaker.

Loren Bayard, wizened little mastermind of cruelty, strutted nervously before the group who sat with elbows planted on a long table. Cigarette smoke clogged the small room. The dictator's eyes were bleary and the skin of their faces was drawn with fatigue. Their white and gold uniforms were soiled, wrinkled. East Bayard stabbed viciously at the table top with a small gold knife.

"Why in hell don't they answer?" he snarled. "Anderson should have called us last night at the latest."

Big blue-jowled Clay Gorman, Commander-in-Chief of the American forces, looked at him from under looming black brows.

"Maybe they got in trouble in the Quicksands," he suggested. "Couldn't get a message through."

Loren Bayard's acid-green eyes snapped derisively upon him.

"You talk like a moron, Gorman! Anderson has charts of the Quicksands that he made himself. He knows that section better than you know your own home. I talked to him two hours before he cleaned up the sleeping army."

"You don't suppose the fool botched the job!" East cracked out. His eyes

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goggled sullenly through those thick, pink glasses of his, and his narrow brow corrugated.

"Botch it? How could he? Twelve to one! I didn't expect more than half of them to come back, but they couldn't *all* be destroyed!"

Marcus Baring's thin, brown cheeks sucked in.

"God help us if they get through! With their disruptors they could mop up this city in six hours!"

The loudspeaker quivered with another violent eruption of static, and Loren Bayard jumped nervously.

"By God, I'll have his stripes for this delay when he gets back—!"

Suddenly East Bayard was on his feet, ear cocked to the amplifier.

"Hold it!" he barked. "There's something now—!"

The ten dived for the big speaker. Out of a sea of crackling emerged a thin, reedy sound. The thread of sound strengthened, became a voice.

"Attention, The Hundred—Attention, New York!"

Bayard looked sharply at East.

"That's not Anderson's voice . . ."

"Attention, The Hundred! This is Samuel Cabot speaking! Your fleet has been destroyed. In two hours we shall attack Newark as a demonstration of what will happen to New York should you resist. You are warned to evacuate the city immediately. No blood will be shed if you follow our orders. Resistance is useless. The complete annihilation of Newark will demonstrate this. We warn you again —*prepare to surrender!*"

THE voice died, and once more static filled the speaker. Loren Bayard was first to speak.

"He failed us!" he croaked. "And now—the devils—are on us!"

East Bayard snarled an oath.

"They'll have to kill ten million men before they take over!" he snapped. "We'll warn Newark. Evacuate the city. Bring all troops to New York to prepare for the attack that will follow."

"NO!" Loren screeched. "That's what they want us to do. Mass all our strength in New York and then attack it and wipe men out by the million! What are we against them and their weapons? Newark is only a blind. It's the Leaders they want! I say, evacuate for the mainland!"

Baring, Mapes, Clay Gorman and the rest stared from one to the other of the Leaders, bewilderedly. East towered over his father angrily.

"You're not figuring on their effeminate battle ideas!" he challenged.

"I tell you, they won't kill a man if they aren't driven to it. Cabot was speaking the truth. We'll turn New York into a powder keg. If they try to touch us—" He swung upon Gorman. "Well, what are you waiting for? Call in your troops while we've got time."

Loren Bayard's skinny form sprang before the door as Gorman saluted and turned to leave. His voice was like the brittle snapping of glass threads.

"Get back! While I'm Leader of Leaders, you'll all take orders from me. East, I gave you credit for more intelligence. You've let them draw you into the simplest military trap that was ever invented. When we get out of this mess, I'll see that you find a station worthy of your merits."

East Bayard's hard eyes narrowed.

"You think so? I've got other ideas. There's just one job for me, and it's time I took over. You've grown senile and foolish. You aren't fit to run this nation in war-times."

Loren Bayard suddenly looked hard at him. Then his green eyes wandered to the set faces of the other Leaders. His thin lips became powdery white.

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"Treason!" he panted. "I'll have you killed for this, East. Baring, put my son under arrest!"

Marcus Baring started to move forward, and then he stopped and looked from the little old dictator to the tall, stalwart younger man. He rocked back, his black eyes thoughtful.

"I'm not so sure he isn't right," he announced slowly. "What he says makes sense to me."

Bayard looked stunned. Then he spat.

"You'll fry in hell for that, Baring! Gorman, arrest them both!"

It was then that the man who had been the greatest power Earth had ever known realized his power had rotted in his hands. For Clay Gorman, Commander-in-Chief of the United American forces, shook his head and stood doggedly. Loren Bayard was alone, caught in the teeth of the trap he himself had fashioned.

East drew his gun deliberately and cocked it, grinning tightly. Loren Bayard cringed against the door.

"Don't—don't do it!" he croaked. "I'll resign. Take over The Hundred. Run the country any way—"

"Leaders don't resign," said East harshly. "They're ousted. I'm ousting you right now!" His voice grew loud, and with each syllable the finger on the trigger tightened.

The old man's cry was drowned in the crash of thunder that filled the room. His arms locked spasmodically over his stomach, where East's bullet had entered his body. Groaning, he went to his knees. His pain-filled eyes tipped up to the coldly watching Leaders, pleading with them.

East's big revolver barked five times more, and Loren Bayard jerked at each shot. The new dictator of America watched him coldly until he stopped squirming. He turned to Gorman.

"My orders stand," he clipped. "Rush all forces within two hours' distance to the city. Assemble all fighting craft above the island. When they attack—we'll be ready!"

CHAPTER XI

Worlds at War!

AT FOUR o'clock that morning, out of the lead gray darkness of the west, a faint whistling was heard, as of wind sighing around the rivets of swift fighting craft. Instantly, squadron upon squadron of fleet warships rose from the metropolis, deadly little dive bombers and fast pursuit ships bristling with powerful guns.

On the bridge of the *Orsis*, beside Nile Vanz, Dane Cabot heard the tinkling of warning bells that announced their coming. Kris was again at the controls. The Chief Gunner was ready at his robot-triggers and television screens. Vanz spoke hurriedly, betraying only a slight nervousness now that the moment of moments was here.

"What is our position?"

Dane was peering into a big, circular screen fixed on the top of a table. Below the ship were dense clouds and black pea-soup fogs. But in the infra-red screen he saw clearly the details of the city below.

"Directly above the island," he said crisply. "I see planes rising—clouds of them! Good Lord, the sky is black! I can hardly see the city for ships, now!"

He fought down the momentary panic that surged up within him. Tried to remember that there was a strong chance of victory if they followed their plans. But the recurrent thought that one tiny mistake would mean defeat kept hammering at him.

Vanz had been in communication

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with the other eight ships for the last hour. Now he began to bark orders:

"Take positions at the twenty-thousand-foot level! Continue to drop at the rate of one hundred feet per second, levelling off at two thousand feet."

The Ionian battle craft swung into the circular formation that had been so successful before. They were in a tight circle, dropping swiftly through the clouds, when the first roaring Earth-ships attacked them. Instantly, the *Orsis* was rocking and lurching as bombs exploded with a hundred feet of her already damaged shell.

East Bayard's host came at them like a swarm of black hornets. They choked the sky. They were everywhere. There was not a spot the raking disruptor beams touched that was not filled with a plane. Through the flagship's insulated shell, their roaring came as a steady blast of thunder. It was unnerving, terrifying.

Dane watched hundreds of ships go down as mosquitoes might drop when a blow-torch flame cuts through clouds of them. But for every combat-craft that crashed into the crowded city streets, another zoomed in from nowhere.

Dane groaned as he saw the *Jovian*, one of their own ships, lurch violently and slide Earthward. Immediately a hundred dive-bombers were after her. Dane closed his eyes tightly as the warship burst into flame.

But there was no time for regrets. The circle was drawn tighter to close the gap. Gunners stabbed more viciously at their triggers. If they lost eight ships in defeating The Hundred, there would still be one to take over.

At ten thousand feet, Dane turned hurriedly to Vanz.

"There seems to be no wind. I think we can start now. Will you notify the other ships?"

Vanz nodded. Dane rushed from the room as he began to call the other commanders. He lurched from one wall of the corridor to the other with the incessant plunging of the ship. Reaching the elevator, he dropped swiftly to the bilge deck, bottom-most level. Here, in stuffy, hot quarters, he groped to the air lock through which waste was shot into space. A dozen big tanks of compressed gas lay beside it in a rack. Dane laboriously deposited three of them in the tube. Then he slammed the lid down and yanked the release lever.

The tanks hurled toward the city. A hundred feet from the ship they passed through a disruptor-beam and exploded. Sparkling, amber gas blossomed in a great, woolly mass. From other ships, tanks began to drop and explode. Dane raised three more tanks and dropped them into the disposal-tube. Again he yanked at the release lever.

The first result came when several of the combat ships wavered, slipped away, and spiralled earthward. Drawing their air supply through filters in the shells of their ships, the pilots had breathed deeply of the Ionian gas. It was the same gas that had put Dane Cabot to sleep on his voyage to Io. And it was sinking in thick, sweetish layers all over New York City!

LOREN BAYARD had been right. His strategy had matched that of the attackers. Had East listened to him, The Hundred would have been safe somewhere on the mainland now. But they were not. They were in Government House, directing the repulse of the invaders.

With the last of his tanks cast overboard, Dane stood at a port looking down. Elation gleamed in his eyes. Yet, tempering that gladness, was deep regret.

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Thousands of fine, trained fighters were dying down there. The flames from their crashing ships sprinkled the still dark city.

Dane went back to the bridge. The attacking craft had been thinned out until pitifully few remained to attack them. But Nile Vanz kept his fleet in battle formation until the last of them were downed by gun or gas.

Abruptly, they realized there were no more combat planes in the sky. The Ionian ships broke formation and dropped slowly into the heart of the metropolis. By the glare of their landing lights, they could see hordes of men, women, and children lying motionless in the streets and parks. Everywhere there were wrecked planes and automobiles. Fires dotted the city.

Margo stood beside Dane as they came to rest in Central Park. He heard her quick, excited breathing. For the first time she was seeing the world Samuel Cabot had been telling her about for years. Dane would have liked to share with her the joy that was evidenced in her face, but for Margo there was Kris; and for Dane there was Brooke.

Brooke had said nothing as the ships neared the city. But now her eyes shone with excitment.

"Dane, it's glorious! The Hundred are defeated. It's you Margo's people have to thank—"

Dane's glance snapped from the port.

"It's Vanz, and my father, and Kris, and a hundred other courageous men," he retorted. "And there's nothing so glorious about the death of thousands of young men."

But he was conscious, as he spoke, that his heart dictated most of the speech. True, the victory had its morbid side. But it meant the culmination of a fight that had gone on through almost a century. The others looked at him queerly, and only Margo knew why his eyes were dark and brooding.

Soldiers began streaming from the ships as soon as word was given that the gas was sufficiently dissipated to be harmless. They walked heavily, unaccustomed to the powerful drag of Earth's gravity. Dane quit the bridge with the rest and they stood silent for a while on the soft greensward of the park. Across the gray dawn sky were splashed crimson washes of color from the fires that leaped through the city unchecked. From other ships hurried Samuel Cabot, Tolek Serj, and the various commanders. Typically practical, scorning the praise the others sought to bestow on him, Cabot was all business.

"We won't win the city by standing here," he told them. "We've got our work cut out for us. And right now these fires must be stopped! The whole city will be in flames in a few hours. Organize a hundred squads of ten men each, Vanz. The fire crews must be awakened and put on the job."

"But can we bring them to, this soon?" Dane queried. "The gas kept me under for four days!"

"That was in the confining walls of the ship. Here, with a wind already blowing, the victim's lungs will be cleared soon. That means they'll be coming around in an hour or so."

Dane started.

"Good Lord! We've got to find Bayard and The Hundred, then. If we lose them, there may be guerrilla warfare with their loyalist bands for years."

Samuel Cabot's eyes lifted to the deep skyscrapers.

"That's the one thing we can't let happen." But the hopelessness of finding the men they sought in that wilderness of man-made granite crags and arroyos mirrored itself in his eyes. "From now on, Dane, you'll take charge. You know this city and ways of the Leaders

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better than anyone else. Perhaps you begin to see, now, why it was important that you remained on Earth."

Dane frowned.

"We'll start by searching the Government House," he decided. "They probably ran their defense from there. I don't think they had time to escape after we gassed the city. If we don't find them, we'll block all roads and and subways and ground all ships—and then pray."

WITH Vanz, Cabot, Tolek Serj, and a score of others, Dane led off into a wide avenue lined with the vast honeycombs of bureaucracy; Telepathy House, Physics House, Chemistry House, and any number of others. Several of these buildings were in flames; others had spilled their polished marble and granite bricks into the street in heaps of wreckage. At the far end of the street they hurried up the broad steps of Government House.

In the street before it, and all the way into the magnificent central room, they waded through battalions of sleeping guards. Lying across their guns, snoring softly, The Hundred's private army raised not a finger to stop them. Dane knew the lay of the various floors from previous visits to Government House. He hurried to the elevators.

High above the paralyzed city, they ran down the hall to the private chambers. With his gun jutting low before him, Dane rushed into the long room. An exclamation of dismay broke from his lips.

"We've lost them!" he groaned. "And yet look—! They were here just a while ago. Their television screens are still trained on the sky and the telephones are off the stands. They must have seen the last of the battle!"

Tolek Serj, chin whiskers bristling, pointed at the floor, where the red glow from a burning Biology Station illuminated it fitfully.

"Something's been dragged from the table to that door!" he cried. "One of them must have escaped the gas and dragged the others out." In the thin veneer of dust on the floor, wide swaths had been brushed in several places.

Dane's eyes widened. His glance snapped to Nile Vanz's face. The shadow-man's translucent features seemed to shine with angry, ominous light. He was thinking the same thing as Dane.

Dane crossed the floor swiftly, to wrench open the opposite door. It gave onto a small elevator. But only the gaping shaft met his eyes. He pivoted, fighting a nervous urge to shout.

"They must be in the streets now! It we work fast—"

CHAPTER XII

Dying World

THEY crowded through the door and raced for the elevator. But when they pushed "Down" nothing happened. Dane tried the other unavailingly. Desperately, they went down the line of elevators and found them all lifeless. Finally, Dane stood back, his face burning with the wrath that boiled him.

"A fine bunch of sleuths!" he snarled. "Ninety-six floors from the city and nothing but stairs to get us there. Our gas-proof friend has pulled the master switch. We may as well start walking. If we hurry, we'll be down in less than an hour."

Winded and nearly exhausted, they emerged on the street in a half hour, but by that time it was useless to search for the missing men. The troops lying prone in the street were beginning to stir. Ionian soldiers hastened to dis-

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arm them.

Dane frowned as he stood watching, conscious that the others were waiting for him to decide what to do next. They, even his father, were as foreign to this city as he was to Io. If order came out of the chaos about them, he must be the one to stimulate it.

"We could use that sleeping army now," he said softly. "We've got the biggest clean-up job in history ahead of us. Every soldier and policeman in this city must be disarmed, and there are probably a million of them. There have been rumors that The Hundred have established scores of 'sleeping armies' about the country, taking a tip from us. The Hundred, themselves, as many as we can find, must be imprisoned. I want the Vedette rolls found and every secret policeman in New York City put under guard. When all that's done, we will broadcast to the people and the whole world what we intend to do. I don't expect trouble from the people themselves, but if they're stirred up they may band against us. They're putty in a good propagandist's hands."

"We'll start our own propaganda machine tomorrow," his father broke in. "Eevery man and woman in the nation will be hanging on his radio trying to learn what has happened. We'll have plenty to tell them!"

NEW YORK CITY awoke, a frightened and bewildered chunk of humanity. The millions knew they were a conquered nation—there were squads of strange, lanky soldiers in every street—but the most pessimistic could see that the invaders weren't the brutal militarists their own Vedette men had been. They were everywhere, helping with the injured and sick, bringing supplies to the homeless. They talked a strange gibberish, but their helpfulness was universal.

The morning of the following day, a strange fleet of ships darkened the sun as it sought a landing across the river. The terrified populace ran for cover from the expected aerial bombardment. Their surprise was boundless when the ships landed peacefully and hordes of men, women and children trooped out, to begin the orderly construction of tent cities.

In Government House, the Ionian staff leaders breathed a collective sigh of relief. The first convoy was in without a ship lost! Now there was the return trip to be made, a trip that might find tragedy at its culmination.

Of The Hundred, seventy-five were found and jailed. One of these was Marcus Baring. He was found in the basement, where apparently he had been abandoned by the person or persons who kidnaped the others. But Baring could tell them nothing of the escape. The Vedette chief was useful, however, after some of his own rigorous grilling methods were put to him. He was persuaded to produce secret police rolls and aid in the capture of most of the four thousand agents in the city.

On the morning of the second day after New York was taken, Samuel Cabot made his announcement to the world from which he had been driven so long before. Dane's eyes were on his glowing features as he spoke into the microphone.

"You have been told by your Leaders that when we came, bloodshed, violence and slavery would ride the skies with us," he reminded his vast audience. "By this time you must know that we come in peace. The autocracy has been overthrown; but it is not slavery we offer you. As soon as it is practical, you will be restored the right of electing your own ruling bodies.

"You have been told a race of savages

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was going to descend on you, bringing rape and murder with them. Have you found the Ionian strangers like that? No! You are living side by side with them now, and they are no different from you except that they expect less. Their world is even now crumbling, and it meant death for them to stay longer. On Io, their friends and relatives may be dying at this moment.

"Men and women of the new America, we plead with you not to fight our efforts to bring you the freedom you last nearly a century ago!" Samuel Cabot's voice shook as he said that. "There will be attempts to reinstate The Hundred. Only you can make certain that these attempts fail. Somewhere, at this moment, East Bayard is listening to my voice and planning how he can still that voice forever. Unless you resolve not to lose the liberty we are putting in your hands, Bayard will be successful. Americans, if liberty means that little to you, I shall welcome that death, wherever and however it comes!"

IT WAS a strongly moved little group in the broadcasting room who heard the last of his plea. Vanz's faded blue eyes were moist as he gripped Cabot's hand.

"Your words would have moved men of stone!" he gruffed. "I only wish we could stay long enough to watch the results. But we are leaving this hour."

Cabot nodded darkly.

"It's been a week now, since we left Good Hope Valley. What happens here is of lesser importance at the moment than what happens on Io. But you will leave someone to help?"

Tolek Serj puffed out his medal-freighted chest.

"I shall be at your service. I fancy I can hold up my end of a hard job."

All but Kris smiled. Kris was looking soberly at Margo. Dane, watching his face, knew what was coming, and his stomach turned to ice.

"Remember your promise when we left, Margo?" the Ionian queried. "That we'd be married when we reached Earth safely? I'm holding you to your word. We'll make it a double wedding—you and I, and Dane and Brooke!"

Excitment followed his suggestion. But there were two of the quartet he named who could not muster the ghost of a smile. The pupils of Margo's gray eyes were large and black as her gaze flew to Dane. Then Dane was turning as Brooke clasped his hand and squeezed it.

Margo colored, with the intent attention of the room focused on her. Old Tolek Serj was grinning broadly, and Kris' eager glance studied her lips. Her voice, when it came, was strangely choked.

"No—no, Kris! That wasn't my promise!" faltered the girl. "I said—when all of the people were settled here—we'd be married. I couldn't do it now, not knowing what is happening to the hundreds of thousands we left behind . . . "

Serj started to expostulate. But it was Kris, no longer smiling, who stopped him with a lifted hand.

"She's right," he said curtly. "Those were the words of the promise, if not the spirit of it!" He gave Dane a slow stare, laden with irony. "Surely you two won't delay your own wedding because of us?" he asked.

It was Dane's turn to snatch at elusive excuses.

"I—I'm afraid I feel about like Margo," he stammered. "I'll be coming along, of course, and—things are so up in the air, it doesn't seem—right, somehow—"

Brooke Loring's smile was the stab of a thin blade.

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"No, it doesn't, does it?" she agreed, sweetly. "And I'm sure you'll do a better job if I'm not along at all!" She was hurrying from the room before Dane could open his mouth.

Awkwardness took possession of the group. Everyone began to find business elsewhere, and soon there remained only Samuel Cabot and the little party who would return with the convoys.

Vanz tried to pass it off by joking with Cabot as they shook hands in farewell. But his joke found a dismal silence. A moment later, Dane and the others said good-bye to the elderly leader and followed Vanz from the room.

BROOKE was on the outskirts of Central Park an hour later when the *Valiant* shot from the ground, stirring up miniature whirlwinds among the leaves and fine dust of the paths. Low, black thunderheads engulfed the ship, billowing in behind it as swiftly as it passed. A moment later, the convoy fleet across the river began to depart.

As the last one left, the girl's slim figure slipped into a small car at the curb and she sped into the jumble of New York's awakening traffic. Leaving the center of town, she came into the quieter, dingy sections of the East Side. In one block, most of the buildings had been ravaged by fire. Here she stopped and began to walk.

Repair crews had not yet penetrated this far. A gaunt old apartment house had lost half its height when a pursuit ship crashed into it with a charge of bombs. Brooke unobtrusively turned into a side entrance and descended to the basement. In a dark room where rats rustled in scattered papers and the sun was known only by its shadows, she went to a low door and knocked softly.

Immediately the door opened a sliver and a bearded, hollow-cheeked face moved into the aperture, the cold blue ring of a pistol held a foot beneath it. East Bayard's voice croaked:

"Brooke! Thank God! We thought they'd got suspicious of you—"

Brooke's features shone with eagerness. She slid into the candle-lit room, and for a moment East clasped her in his strong arms. Then she exclaimed:

"They don't suspect anything yet, the fools! All but Sam Cabot and Tolek Serj have just left for Io with the convoy. You could get Cabot and Serj right now—they'll be leaving the building before long.

Defeat had stamped him with its haggard badge, but the fervor of hatred was like a scalding fluid in his body. Bayard shook his head impatiently.

"It's a short chance we wouldn't be seen. We're going after the others."

"Using what for a ship?" scoffed Clay Gorman. "They'll watch those battle-ships like hawks."

The four other men who sat on boxes about the cellar watched each man's face as he spoke. Desperate men they were, eager for any change to escape.

"Let them have their ships," Bayard snapped. "For this job, I'll take a rocket ship of our own make."

"But, East—!" Brooke regarded him incredulously. "The battle over the city showed the superiority of the Red Spot concentrate as a weapon and motive power over our products."

"In this atmosphere, maybe," Bayard said. He patted some wrinkled, dirty papers in his shirt pocket. "Those notes of Benchley's have kept me from going crazy these last three days. They've done more than that, too. Given us a valuable weapon. Benchley was something of a physicist. Enough of one to learn more about the concentrate than even the Ionians

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know. I'm gambling on his being right."

"This is no time for a gamble!" barked Gorman. "We'll take the surest way."

East's bearded jaws showed the working of his muscles.

"Hasn't this whole thing been a gamble — a seventy-five year gamble? We've won so far because the Leaders held all the cards. We've got only one card, now, and that's Benchley's notes. But I'm willing to stake everything that he was right!"

He turned to Brooke.

"We won't forget our debt to you, Brooke—dragging us into the elevator and hauling the six of us to safety. Here's the last request we'll ask of you. Come back for us at midnight.—Have food for a couple of weeks. We're going to break out one of the ships hidden back in the hills."

"What are you going to do, East? What's your plan?"

East let a smile turn up the corners of his hard lips.

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it, shall we?" he said.

CHAPTER XIII

Cataclysm

IT was not a pleasant one, that return voyage of the *Valiant*. Nile Vanz was sour with worrying over the fate of his countrymen; Margo worried about that and Kris' jealousy; and Dane fumed under Kris' unjustifiably sarcastic attitude.

Dane held mostly to his room. He tried to keep his mind off Margo by thinking of the situation on Earth. There was plenty to disturb the most placid mind.

Then, after four tedious days, came a more immediate worry. Jupiter was in the sky before them, floating serenely through space! Io came rocketing above the horizon, and with the sight of it, all was forgotten but the fate of the little colony they were racing to save.

Crowding the ports, they stared ahead as Kris put the ship into a long, sloping drop. Behind the *Valiant* wallowed the hundred-odd huge transports, empty of all save a few dozen sailors. Io was no more than a barren chunk of rock. Of landmarks, there were almost none.

Crags and scarps had been levelled with the surrounding plains, plains composed of giant black rocks that looked as if they had been smashed in a sack like ice cream for a freezer, and then shaken far and wide. Here and there were seen deep rifts across the terrain. In a few weeks the planet would be spliting through and through. Then Jupiter would fling off the fragments and number one less moon among her satellites.

Across the night-side of the planet the fleet swept, lights questing downward, sweeping, sweeping over the wastelands. The watchers' eyes ached with searching. Back and forth the *Valiant* moved, scouring the dead world. But no trace of life was raised. There came a time when Kris grunted impatiently and turned the ship toward the other side of the globe.

At Margo's side, Dane could feel the trembling she tried to conceal. Unconsciously, his hand brushed hers, and the girl's fingers swiftly seized it. She leaned against him as if deathly weary, her golden hair soft against his cheek.

"Do you think we'll ever find them?" she whispered.

"Of course we will! We've hardly started looking."

Nile Vanz' rumbling tones broke through the cabin.

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"Bear off to port a point. Something shining over there."

The battleship pivoted on an invisible axis and moved westward. Rocky humps, jumbled canyon, passed under the anxious eyes of the searchers. Nile Vanz stood hunched before the glass, binoculars to his eyes. A murmured oath came from his lips.

"Dammit! Just a chunk of volcanic glass. . . . As you were, Kris—"

Margo's fingers tensed on Dane's. "Wait! Dane—Kris— *a flare!*"

FROM the far rim of the planet it was arching, like a green-and-white meteor. Each man's eyes had picked it up before it gained its zenith and exploded into a dozen smaller flares. While Kris was still staring at it, the warlord's hands came down on the controls, yanking back the accelerator. The *Valiant* hurled itself forward with a surge of power that had every passenger scrambling for support.

In five minutes they were sinking swiftly upon the city, shadowy in the dim light of Io's brief dusk. The changes a week and a half had wrought upon it were far-reaching. The entire eastern part of the city was buried. The tall mountains on that side had fallen, and the broken rubble of the plains was sweeping in like a crushing flood. But still the Intensifier stood high above the colony, and the densely-populated west side was almost untouched.

Crowds milled beneath the fleet as the ships glided into the square. Darkness came before they touched ground. Police thrust back the mob. They opened up an aisle with brandished night-sticks. The returning crews wasted no time in greetings as they jumped to the ground, for the bitterly cold air bit savagely at their exposed hands and faces. In single file, they hurried into the nearest building, a lofty dormitory for Io's homeless.

Margo had only one thought when they were inside. She turned to the swarthy, excited official who had been in charge during their absence.

"How many, Luji? How many have died?"

"Only a few hundred, Princess," he told her. "But there have been terrible rumblings and shocks for twenty hours. I'm afraid the city won't last another day."

Margo took a deep breath of relief.

"Start loading them immediately," she told Luji. "Each ship will leave as soon as it is ready."

Luji bowed hurriedly and ran out. Margo watched him go. Her hand passed wearily across her forehead. Dane could barely hear her whispered words.

"I think—I'll lie down—for a while —"

In the next moment he was darting forward to catch her as she slumped. He and Kris reached the girl at the same moment. They laid her on a couch. Dane bent over and heard the soft, regular breathing. All the strain had left her features, and her lips were slightly parted like those of a sleeping child.

"She's all right," he told the worried Ionian. "Better off than she's been in weeks. Let's carry her into the ship so we won't have to wake her before we leave. She'll probably sleep for twenty-four hours solid."

They found heavy night clothing and threw several blankets over the girl. Picking up the couch, they carried her into the *Valiant*. After that, Kris grunted:

"I'm going up to the Intensifier. If somebody doesn't stir the boys up on these last loads of concentrate there'll be a lot we have to leave behind. Care

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to go along?"

A thin voice of warning whispered in Dane's ear. Something about Kris' manner did not quite ring true. Nevertheless, he found himself shrugging:

"Sure, if I can help."

KRIS left the ship, with Dane close behind him. Trudging up the narrow cobbled streets, they had to stand aside many times for crowds of men and women pouring from alleys with their belongings. The Rulers' House was deserted when they passed it; long cracks in the masonry told why.

The Great Red Spot, unusually bright tonight, was like an ugly crimson gash in the sky above the hill-top when they gained it. Momentarily, Dane was gripped by the intensity of its light. It sparkled on the bronze machinery about them, cast a reddish fog over the city. The cancer-like crater appeared almost to have a sort of life of its own. It was not for almost a minute that Dane noticed the brooding silence in the plant. Quickly he looked at Kris.

"I thought you said we'd help," he frowned. "They're all gone, and the vats are empty."

The shadow-man smiled a little as he drew his gun.

"Sorry I had to mislead you. But it was the only way to get you alone without arousing your suspicions."

The sinews of Dane's arms and legs began to bunch, and his glance flicked to the gun.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"Let's be honest with each other," Kris suggested quietly. "You and I both love Margo. But we can't both have her. So one of us is going to stay behind when the ships leave."

"You damned, jealous fool!" Dane raged. "Margo's yours. I've never tried to take her from you and I wouldn't if she offered me her love. Put that gun away. Killing me is the one thing that would alienate her from you forever."

"I want more than marriage with Margo," Kris clipped. "I want her love. While you're alive, I could never be sure of it. Nor could you be sure of it if I were alive. For the good of all of us, either you or I is going to die here."

The light that burned in the Ionian's face was madness, and Dane knew better than to tackle him unarmed. Temporizing, he grunted:

"What's your proposition?"

Kris held the gun in his palm.

"This is a fifteen shot pistol, of an ordinary Earth-make. I have one charge in it. We will spin the cylinder, then toss a coin for the first shot. The man who wins, fires first at the other. If that chamber is empty, the gun passes to the other man. And so on." As an afterthought, he patted his gold-mail shirt. "I have another pistol in here. If you try to club me with the gun when it is your turn to shoot I'll defend myself. Now let's start. Do you have a coin?"

Dane found a quarter.

"Tails!" he muttered. He tossed it, his eyes clinging to the shadow-man's face. How to get out of this tragic situation seemed as difficult at present, as trisecting a right triangle with a pair of dividers. Kris grunted with satisfaction.

"I WIN! Ready, Cabot?"

The gun was close to his stomach, and there was not the shadow of a chance to stop Kris now. Sweat came out in fine beads over his face. His stomach sucked in. Dane had to lick his lips before he could reply.

"Go ahead, if you've got to!"

Kris pulled the trigger. The pistol emitted a sharp click. The Ionian laughed, tossed the gun over, and handed it butt foremost to Dane.

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"Good luck, Cabot!" he smiled.

With the gun firmly gripped, Dane suddenly began to plead.

"Kris, for God's sake—!"

Kris' hand moved toward his other gun.

"Fire—before I do!"

Dane closed his eyes and pulled the trigger. His body pushed forward a trifle, braced against the expected recoil of the powerful revolver. And that empty click sounded again.

Kris took the gun roughly from his fingers. Without a second's pause, he pulled the trigger. He had flipped it about and handed it back to Dane before the Earthman realized what had happened. Once more it was his turn, and he steadied his nerves for the ordeal.

The curved sliver of metal yielded to the pressure of his finger. In the next moment an explosion rocked the ground. The noise was a thunder-clap in Dane's ears. Dane sobbed aloud, and his eyes opened.

But Kris was standing before him, unharmed!"

The Ionian was trembling. His eyes were like two black holes in his pale face. Slowly he twisted to look down the hill, to cry out as though a knife had been stabbed in his back. Dane echoed his cry with a groan.

"Bombs! Good Lord, Kris, they've done it! Bayard's attacking!"

CHAPTER XIV

The Red Doom

TEARS were streaming down the Ionian's face.

"I tempted the gods too far!" he said. "Last time, on this very hill, my jealousy brought what we though was an attack. This time it's happened!"

Below them, a red column of shooting flames showed where the first bomb had dropped. Buildings were tumbling for several hundred feet about the spot. Overhead there was the staccato booming of rockets. While Dane searched for the ship, another bomb landed close to the knoll. The shock hurled both men to the ground.

Kris yelled a warning and began tugging at Dane's arm.

"The Intensifier!" he cried. "It's coming down!"

Dane half ran, half crawled, to the edge of the terrace. Stone columns crumbled behind him, and a second later the ponderous bronze bowl crashed in upon the plant. Before the rolling echoes lost themselves in the sky, he was on his feet and running.

"Come on, Kris! They'll need us in the ship."

"If we can make it," the shadow-man grunted.

Into the city they plunged, fighting crowds of panic-stricken emigrants. Dane still held the gun. Time after time he had to chop with it to batter his way through an impenetrable mob. They climbed through heaps of broken masonry where bodies lay buried and the injured shrieked for help. Screaming women implored their help as they dragged dead or dying husbands and children toward the square. Flames raked across the housetops.

And everywhere there was the thunder of crashing buildings, the roar of bombs. A feeling of horrible unreality fastened on Dane. He hardly felt the smash of bodies against his own, the hot blood that poured from cuts on his face and arms.

Then, suddenly, the teeming square was before them. Clawing, crawling, fighting, clubbing, they made their way to the battleship. The doors were closed when they reached it, but Dane pounded on one of the ports until Nile Vanz

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saw him and came running to let them in.

A dozen of the transports had already taken off half-loaded. One of them had come crashing back with a shot through it. Unarmed, the convoys were helpless against the attackers.

The *Valiant* carried only a handful of men. Dane prayed that Margo had left the ship, but as the take-off gravity riveted them to the floor, he saw her in the doorway of the bridge.

From the first, the men in the warship knew there was something amiss. Instead of a fleet, they discovered only one Earth-craft in the sky, and it was in full retreat. Thankful that the bombing was at least temporarily over, Dane was yet mystified by the lay of things.

The attacking ship was small. It dodged, spiralled, sprinted, to keep out of the path of the *Valiant's* guns. And every minute the two ships were drawing closer to Jupiter. The sky-giant's gravity seized them like the tentacles of an octopus. They were hurtling into the Red Spot, and still the Earth-ship fled on.

"There are gold uniforms in the quartermaster's room," Vanz shouted. "Everyone who isn't wearing one, get into a suit right now. "We're coming into the danger zone."

Margo left to find a uniform, so that only Dane, Kris, and the Warlord were on the bridge. Vanz motioned Dane to the Chief Gunner's post.

"We're closing the gap," he told him. "Be ready with that bow cannon."

Like a huge, red Grand Canyon, a thousand miles long and hundreds wide, the Red Spot shot its ragged walls up around them. It was like diving headfirst into hell. What looked like flames, but was actually some form of radiation, shimmered on the pitted surface of the walls. The Earth-ship was roaring along one wall, dodging in and out of escarpments and massive outcroppings. Kris whistled.

"Look at those madmen!" he jerked. "If they brush one of the rocks, they'll have such an explosion as we've never seen. That's nothing but pure concentrate!"

Now the ship was pulling out into the void, sinking deeper into the bottomless hole. Vanz grunted: "Line her and give her all you've got!"

Dane saw the stern of the ship weave into the middle of his sights. He pressed the firing button. Nothing happened, except that their quarry pivoted and started back at them.

"Fire that gun!" Nile Vanz shouted. "Didn't you hear me,"

Dane's reply was a rough whisper.

"I heard you. But—the guns are dead!"

IT CAME to Kris first, the thing that had happened.

"The concentrate, Vanz!" he jerked, "It—it won't work in the presence of all the concentrate around us. You drop an iron bolt in between two powerful magnets, and it will hang there. That's what's happening here. The very air is charged with resistance."

"That can't be," Dane objected. "Why would the ship's motive power continue if the guns are dead? Aren't they practically the same thing?"

"No. The ship uses the concentrate more as a catalyst. The other elements in the mixture keep us going."

The discussion ended abruptly, as a shell exploded within feet of them and sent them wallowing toward the wall. Kris sent the ship straight up in a climb that would take them out of range of the attackers.

But the little pursuit was faster. It was curving around ahead of them in a matter of seconds. Kris was forced to dodge and weave to keep out of the

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other's sights. The pursuit came roaring down upon them, driving them deeper into the hole. Within the *Valiant* all was silence. Margo had come back, dressed in an over-large uniform, and she got the story from Dane in monosyllables.

Dane was thinking; black, ugly thoughts that would not be suppressed. Here in the Great Red Spot, a battle between two ships was deciding all that he and his father and grandfather had fought for. New York was still in the hands of the rebels, but how long would it remain that way if Bayard and his cohorts returned to gather up their lost forces? Not long.

Kris broke into his thoughts by exclaiming:

"We've still got the little one-gun auxiliary ship in the hold. Take the controls, Vanz. I've got a notion I can give them something to think about!"

"What use?" Vanz argued, taking over the controls the other had deserted. "The gun in the auxiliary is no better than ours."

"I wasn't thinking of guns," Kris said cryptically.

Dane seized his arm as he started from the room.

"Stay here with Margo," he said gruffly. "That's a job for me."

"I said I'm taking her out!" Kris flared. "Get back to the guns."

Dane roughly thrust him aside.

"Do you have to have a gun stuck in your face to listen to reason?" he bit out. "This is my job. Your job is with Margo and the people."

"Then we'll both go," Kris countered. And nothing Dane could say or do would prevent him from following him to the hold.

THE auxiliary was a tiny ship that would just hold two men. The pair got it on the runway, set the automatic air-lock that jetted the ship from the *Valiant's* belly, and crawled inside. Dane made his way to the pilot's seat. When everything was set, he signaled Kris. The Ionian yanked a cable and the blocks fell off the runway. Then he slammed the door, bolted it, and they plunged into the tube.

In that tiny craft, it was like falling overboard to leave the mother ship. The shell was half glass, and Dane could see clearly from every angle. The first thing he saw was the Earth-ship zooming up at the *Valiant*. He flung the auxiliary straight into her nose, then ducked at the last minute, so close that he could see East Bayard at the controls of the ship, and at his side—Brooke. She was laughing—laughing, as she had always laughed at Dane.

Now he was whirling the craft about and tearing after the attacker. A gun belched flame among the other's stern rockets. A bomb whistled by them so close that its passing jerked at the ship. Dane saw the folly of attacking from that angle again.

Three times in the next minute he saved the *Valiant* by darting in and forcing Bayard to yield. The Leader's shots were coming at the auxiliary more often than at the *Valiant*, now. Realizing that, Dane said hurriedly to Kris:

"We've got his goat! Maybe we can draw him away from the ship for a minute—"

"Not long enough for them to get away," the Ionian grunted.

Dane knew it was probably true. He knew something else, too: That even if they decided to bring Bayard down by crashing head-on into him, the job wouldn't be so easy. The pursuit was fast and maneuverable, and Bayard could dodge as easily as they.

As if Kris had been reading his thoughts, he said:

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"There's a surer way than that, Dane."

"What's that?"

"I'll show you," Kris said.

Dane heard him moving, but it did not occur to him what was happening until the Ionian was upon him. He came about with a startled yell. Kris' fist hit him solidly behind the ear. Blackness came into Dane's mind. His last remembrance was of crawling painfully to his knees and being struck down again. After that he lay still.

Kris had to work fast. He locked the controls and found a space suit. Laboriously, he got the Earth-man into the suit and carried him to the air-lock. He opened the inner door, put Dane into the tube, and re-locked it. His hand closed on the release lever.

"Good-bye, my friend!" he whispered. "Be good to her!"

The lever came down. Dane floated away in the bulky suit. Jupiter's gravity immedaitely laid hold on him and he began to fall. . . .

Kris planted himself before the controls. He called Vanz.

"Pick up Cabot, Vanz. I had to trim my ballast!"

He watched the *Valiant* change its course. Then he went after East Bayard. Like a hornet, he dived upon him. Time and again the Earth-ship barely evaded his blind rushes. Then Bayard must have seen the warship hurtling deeper into the chasm, for he left it and turned upon the auxiliary. Immediately the tiny craft was pulling away from him. Bayard notched up his rockets a point.

They were traveling at terrific speed when the red walls loomed up ahead of them. Kris kept on, straight at them. Bayard clung to his tail, firing incessantly. At the last minute, the shadow-man flattened away and skirted the walls. But the Leader was a match for him, in courage. His own ship skimmed perilously close to the pure concentrate. It was that very courage that Kris had counted on.

Without warning, his ship swerved. Bayard could not realize what was happening when the Ionian headed straight at the wall. He had learned much about the red crystals from Benchley's notes, but one of the things he had not learned was the terrible explosive power of the concentrate.

Kris' ship dug into the wall, almost burying itself with its forward drive. For a split-second, nothing happened. Then the wall, for a section twenty miles long, belched outward as by volcanic action. Flames seared the air and heated to incandescence the ship in their midst. Smoke rolled forth in black billows. Great chunks of concentrate the size of hummocks were tossed aloft. One of those giant rocks struck the pursuit amidships. Against the boulder it splattered as a drop of molten solder splatters on a cement floor.

For the space of ten minutes there was violence and destruction. Then the last of the stones tumbled into the black core of the crater, and silence dwelt again in the Great Red Spot.

Out of the bedlam rose a single, silver ship. The *Valiant* had caught Dane Cabot on one of its loading doors and taken him in. Moving faster by the minute, the big warship headed home.

THE happiest day of Dane's life was when he went back to work as an ordinary chemist. With the Ionian colony established and The Hundred's undercover agents dragged out in the open, normalcy came back to the United Americas. But Dane refused a position of any kind in governing the new democracy.

"No more politics for me!" he told Margo. They were sitting on the porch

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of their small home up the river from the Ionian city that summer evening. "I'll leave that to Dad and Vanz and your father. There's just one crusade I'm going to make before I quit for good."

Margo's golden head didn't move from its place on his shoulder.

"What's that?"

"Destroy these Biology Stations!" Dane said. "Think of the menace to our racial customs! In a few more years of this incubator system, every family album in the country will be no more than a glorified catalogue of mason jars!"

« AMAZING ODDITIES »

THE ADVANTAGE OF COLOR BLINDNESS

UNITED STATES military authorities were very much surprised not so long ago to discover that they'd have to make a few changes in their requirements for pilots and observers in the air corps. It seems that color-blind applicants had long been rejected from service in the air force because of their deficiency. However, on a trial flight above camouflaged gun positions an artillery observer and an air corps observer were both given a crack at detecting camouflaged positions. When the flight was done it was found that the artillery observer had indicated a great many more hidden gun positions than his air corps companion.

Thinking that there might be something wrong with the air corps observer's eyesight, the man was tested and found to have better than normal vision. Forthwith the artillery observer was tested—and found to be quite competely color-blind!

Sending up other color-blind men on observation duty, the authorities were further startled to find that these men, too, could spot camouflaged gun positions much more readily than men with normal vision.

The explanation was found. Persons with normal vision, seeking out camouflaged positions, were much more easily betrayed by painted canvas camouflage that blended with the colors of the ground. And this was due to the fact that they *were* so acutely aware of colors.

On the other hand, the color blind observers, not having to notice the colors of the landscape beneath them, were able to detect the camouflaged gun positions by the fact that light on painted surfaces caught their attention in a different manner from the light hitting actual landscape foliage!

LONG RANGE BEAUTIES

ONE of the most common misconceptions about butterflies is the legend that they are inordinately delicate and extremely short-lived creatures. It is generally believed that these fragile moth-creatures emerge from the cocoons only long enough to flutter about for a day or three, then die. But such is not the case.

Many butterflies live for months, and many more have been known to travel thousands of miles. The Monarch butterfly, a species very common in the United States, has been known to cover the distance between this country and England, assisted, of course, by high winds accidentally carrying it out to sea. And this in view of the fact that the butterfly travels on an average speed close to six miles an hour.

PSYCHOLOGY FOR PIGEONS

THE all time peak to which the uses of psychology have been put was probably reached when that science found its place among the trainers of racing pigeons. And the results it has accomplished in that field is on a par with what it's cleared up in other places.

In order to psychologically "step up" the speed of their racing pigeons the trainers resorted to a plan that is as ingenious as it is astonishing. It seems that, shortly before a race is to be held, the trainers separate the pigeon from his mate. Several hours before they are due to ship him to the place where the race is to be started, the trainers then take the distraught bird back to his coop where they have planted a rival.

The pigeon, seeing that a new and handsome male is occupying quarters with his mate, becomes furiously jealous and lights into the affection alienator with mayhem in his heart. But before the battle can really get under way, the trainer reaches into the coop and once more takes the racing bird away from his mate—leaving the rival there smirking in triumph.

When the race starts, several hundred miles off, Joe Pigeon is still burning. Not only does he know that another pigeon has muscled in on his mate—or so he thinks—but his rage and vanity want him to get back home as quickly as possible to finish the fight he had just started. Trainers report a splendid increase in speed. But it must be tough on the poor bird!

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THE RAID FROM MARS

BY MILES J. BREUER

CHAPTER I

The Radium Thefts

IN a corner office of the ground floor of the Department of Justice Building in Washington, D. C., a man sat bent over his desk with his forehead in his hands. He was a keen and powerful looking person, but at the present he looked utterly puzzled and helpless. He was Herbert Hawes, Chief of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and a famous man.

Beside him on the desk, and on the

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RAIDERS come from Mars to steal Earth's radium. In desperate defense, an entire army division is wiped out. Then "Swoop" Martin, air pilot, volunteers a suicidal attack.

floor around his chair, were arranged stack after stack of telegrams, yellow with black headings, and white with blue headings.

"Mercy Hospital reports mysterious disappearance of radium salts during night."

"Entire stock of radium disappeared last night. Two attendants found unconscious!"

"One hundred thousand dollars worth of radium disappeared from Mt. Sinai Hospital. Nurse and doctor unconscious!"

"Total radium supply stolen. Locks demolished. No clues!"

Thus ran the telegrams, all of them. They came from all of the large hospitals in the principal cities in the United States, and from numerous large University laboratories. From Bangor, Maine to Jacksonville, Florida, from Portland, Oregon, to Los Angeles, and criss-crosswise over the country, the story was the same.

"A raid on the country's supply of radium!" the chief gasped, and sank down in his chair.

The realization of the enormity of the affair grew on him by leaps and bounds.

"What a holdup!"

Now he sat at his desk with his head on his hands. There wasn't a clue. There was nothing to go on. He could think of no way to start. He sat there and worried.

He did not know how long he had been brooding there, when he slowly became aware of an insistent irritation forcing itself into his detached brain. It dawned on him that it was the telephone. He rubbed his eyes, shook himself, and grabbed the instrument.

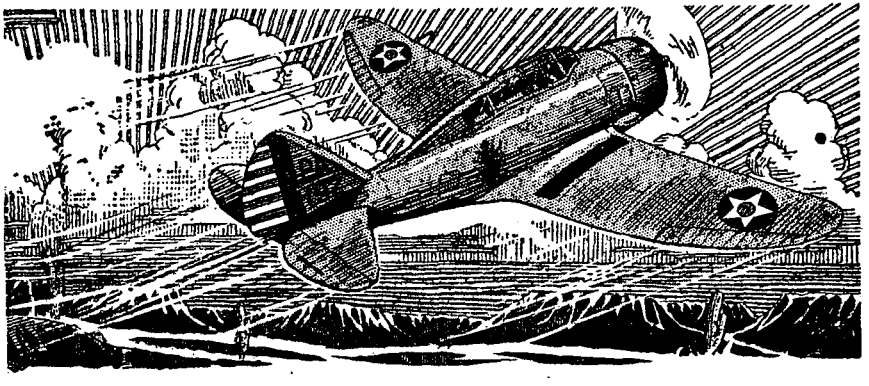
"Hello!" he said, as quickly as he could.

"Lincoln, Nebraska, calling," came through the telephone. "Is this Chief Hawes? Chief of Police Henderson, of Lincoln, wishes to speak to you."

There was a momentary silence while the connection was made, then a gruff voice spoke.

The two chiefs identified themselves to each other.

"I suppose you are investigating the disappearance of the radium," said the Police Chief from Lincoln.



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Chief Hawes grunted in a dubious sort of fashion. Chief Henderson from Lincoln continued:

"The accounts in the newspapers—"

Chief Hawes just now thought to look up at the clock. Three o'clock. Four hours his head had lain sunk on his desk, thinking and dozing alternately after this terrific shock had struck him.

"—the accounts in the newspapers have been most unsatisfactory, but I gather there is a serious problem on. I have what may be a clue. Do you want it?"

"Do I? Do I? Come on quick!" roared Chief Hawes, banging his desk with the other fist.

Chief Henderson continued:

"There was a young chap, just a boy, in my office yesterday, with a most fantastic tale, which now strikes me as having a possible hook-up with this thing. It was so wild, that I told him it was bosh and sent him about his business. Now that this thing has turned up, I feel that there may be something in the boy's story. We ought to look into it."

"What did he have to say?" demanded Chief Hawes.

"He had a curious tale about some inventor with heart disease communicating with Mars—; shall I send him over to you?"

"Nuts! I thought you had a clue. What d'ya want to bother me with . . ."

"Well," the Western Police Chief explained, "his story said just that: stealing radium by some guys from Mars."

"Nuts!"

"Shall I send him over?" queried Chief Henderson.

"Yes! No!" roared Hawes. *"I'm coming over there."*

IN one of the homes on a modest residence street in Lincoln, Nebraska, a sixteen-year old boy walked into the living-room, where his father was reading a newspaper, and turned off the radio. By the door, at the foot of the hat-rack, a physician's emergency bag and two canvas paper-carriers' bags showed plainly that both father and son were busy men.

"Dad," the boy inquired earnestly, "Would it be a good or a bad thing for the human race if someone discovered how to make people live forever?"

"Well, well," the doctor replied. "You are being mighty serious about it. Is that for one of your debates?"

"Yes," Ronald answered eagerly; that excuse was as good as any.

"I believe," the doctor continued, "that if everlasting life were given to the human race, it would be a very bad thing. If no one died, in a population which is now stationary, it would double in one generation."

"You mean," the son reminded, "that if the birth-rate continued unchanged."

"It would," the doctor assured him. "No ifs are needed. You can fancy, after a few generations, the horrible crowding up of the earth. Think of the pressure, the competition, the lowered standard of living, worse than anything in India or China—and growing worse and no end to it."

"But supposing," suggested Ronald, "that birth-control were put into effect?"

"Don't make me laugh," his father countered. "Voluntarily or individually, people would never do anything. By public measures, perhaps in a hundred years after everybody was crazy, something might be done. No, I rather think your gift of everlasting life would be no boon to race, and of questionable benefit to the individual."

As the boy said nothing further, the doctor resumed his reading. At intervals however, he glanced over the top of his paper at his son, who sat there

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motionless in a stiff chair, staring straight ahead of him and saying nothing. Undoubtedly something was preying on his mind. The doctor, a practical man who knew boys well, said nothing, realizing that it would all eventually come out.

The boy maintained his puzzled posture for nearly two hours before he stirred. Then he rose, stretched himself, and remarked that he hated to go to bed.

At that moment there was a gallop of many footsteps on the porch floor, and a ring at the doorbell. In a moment the room was filled with Chiefs of Police and Government officers.

"THERE used to be a light in old man Dragstedt's window every morning at 4:30," Ronald began his explanation, "when I passed his house carrying papers. I knew he was a sickly old man who never went anywhere, and lived alone. Sometimes one of the windows went funny colors in the night, as I went by with my paper-bags. He's got a crazy chimney on his house, like a tall pipe, and shiny, like polished metal.

"Although it is against the rules of the paper, one morning I couldn't resist trying a peek in at one of his windows. I tiptoed up on the porch, but the minute I stepped on his rug, an alarm went off somewhere in the house. The door opened, and he started to roar at me, and then collapsed on the floor. He has heart disease, and gets attacks when he gets sore.

"I dragged him to the davenport and was going to call up my dad, but he begged me not to. He had some pills that he took. I got them for him and they made him better in half an hour. I stayed with him and warmed him a glass of milk. I saw nothing in the house out of the way, but in the direction of the queerly lighted windows there was a closed door.

"The next day I walked boldly up and knocked on the door. He had me in and I asked him how he was. I got to dropping in that way and found that he was grateful for a lot of little things I could do to help him. But, he never opened that door.

"I thought I would never find out what was in there, until one day when I rang his doorbell and he didn't answer. I opened up and went in, fearing that something had happened to him. I found the secret door open, and he was just about to come in through it, when he had another spell. He fell down and his face was so blue it gave me the creeps. I got him to bed, gave him his tablet, and had a look at the room.

"A lot of the stuff there was undoubtedly short-wave equipment. I've got a ham station of my own, and am up on it. The scanning elements and the big screen of a television set were also familiar. But there was an awful pile of strange stuff there that meant nothing to me.

"He came to as I was standing in the middle of the apparatus room, looking around, trying to figure out stuff. He didn't get sore; he got to know that it would give him another spell with his heart. So I just shut the door, warmed him some more milk, and never said a word and he didn't either.

"But after that he let me come in and watch him working at the apparatus. He used *cw*, but he had six keys instead of one; he played five of them with the fingers of his right hand like piano keys; it must have taken a lot of practice to get that way, because he really made 'em sing. Another odd thing was that his transmission wave had several tones to it—no; he must have had several transmission waves. It gave a musical effect as he sent."

"Say!" interrupted Chief Henderson,

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"where is this old bird? Dragstedt you say? We'll listen to the rest of it from him."

"Well, I guess he's gone to them. Or they took him away with them. He hasn't been at his house for 24 hours. But his stuff is all right."

"What do you mean by *they? Who* took him away?"

The boy showed embarrassment.

"Well," he hesitated; "I know you'll think I'm crazy—"

"Suppose you are!" said the police chief, his voice rough with impatience. "Who took him away?"

"Well—the Martians. But wait till I get to 'em."

THE men settled in their chairs with a certain amount of relief. Martians! If that was all, they needn't worry. They had thought it might be some well-known crooks. The boy continued his narrative:

"Then one day, when he didn't come to the doorbell, I opened the door again and walked on in. The inner door was open. I could see him at the television apparatus. I really saw a Martian on the screen!

"I saw him plenty plain and had a long time to look at him. Dragstedt was so absorbed that he didn't know I was there for thirty minutes.

"The thing on the screen moved, and worked little pieces of a vast stack of machinery behind it. It had bright eyes, and arms and legs, and wasn't so very different from people after all. But for a person, it looked small and fragile and easy to fall to pieces. It moved with quick jerks. As it moved, little buzzes on different notes came out of Dragstedt's machine. It gestured with its hands, and then brought out papers. Or, you know, whatever they use for papers. But it looked just like papers. Some had maps and some had mathematical stuff on them.

"Then Dragstedt turned around and saw that I had been watching him. He came near having another spell. But, he's a smart guy, and he calmed down and held it off. He decided he might as well tell me about it. I understand the stuff pretty well and can give you the high spots—"

"Whatever Ronald says about radio and related subjects," his father interrupted, turning to the police officers, "you can put down as being accurate and dependable. I myself am amazed at the amount of knowledge he has on those things."

"Kids are hot on that stuff," the grizzled old D. C. I. chief mumbled to himself.

"He had been a professor of physics," Ronald went on. "But he inherited a lot of dough from a relative and got to experimenting on his own. He was interested in picking up the portion of radio waves that are reflected from the Heaviside layer. He had some odd notion about the thing and was measuring intensities. He found that the reflected portion was weaker than the transmitted portion to an extent not explained by the square of the distance equation. He tried it with direction beams, and the more nearly vertical he got his beams, the greater the loss in intensity—just opposite to what you'd expect—"

Chief Hawes grunted and mumbled something about what he would expect.

"When he finally directed a successfully controlled beam in an accurately vertical direction, he lost most of his short-wave energy. Can't you see—that he was putting a wave *through* the Heaviside layer?"

Chief Hawes grunted again, so that Donald had to smile.

"He played with it a lot, and sent out a lot of amateur broadcasting, and *cw.*

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It wasn't really very long, a few weeks, till he was amazed to find that he was getting signals in return. The poor fellow must have gone nearly crazy before he figured out what those odd, broken tones were.

"FOR many months he worked on them, but could make no sense out of them. After quite a while, it struck him that he ought to build a television apparatus in connection. By that time his heart was getting bad; he went to a doctor and the doctor wanted to put him in a hospital. He couldn't stand that, and went back to his apparatus. After some weary months he finally saw his first Martian on the screen.

"Eventually he learned to talk to them. By means of the vision screen and his multitoned *cw,* he and the Martians developed a language from gestures and pointing to objects, and then gradually into words. I got on to a good deal of the stuff myself as I watched him, and it isn't so hard at that. When I got so that I could stand there and get what the *cw* was saying, I got quite a thrill out of it.

"Well, it turned out that these Martians lived under the ground on their planet, because it was too cold and dry on top and no air. They had it all fixed livable underground. They were an old, old race, much older than ours. They had learned among other things, the secret of preventing death, or at least of putting it off indefinitely. As their births were regulated in the laboratory merely to replace rare losses by death, the race was stable.

"However, within the recent century, a new disease had sprung up among them which they could not conquer with all their science. Deaths occurred in such numbers that the laboratories could not replace them by a sufficient number of births; their mathematicians predicted the early extinction of the race. Their physicists said that the disease was due to the complete loss of radioactive minerals, due to the old age of the planet itself. I saw some of the sick ones on the television screen, and it must have been some kind of cancer.

"What did Dragstedt do, but describe radium to them, and ask them if they knew what it was, and if they thought it would cure their stuff. Of course that is the first thing that would have occurred to me. No; all their radium had finally broken itself up into non-radioactive elements. But they grasped the idea, only too promptly.

"The gist of it is, that Dragstedt and the Martians got up a scheme, where he is to steer them to the caches of radium when they come to Earth in a space ship. In return, they will cure his heart disease and give him everlasting life. Dragstedt has been all over the country, getting the layouts of hospitals and universities, which he could easily do, for he is a well known physicist himself.

"Those birds up there on Mars even planned mechanical things to get around in, when they got to Earth, because their bodies are too flimsily built for our heavier gravitation.

"That's all I know, except that I overheard that their ship is down in the sandhills, about fifty miles southeast of Alliance; and that they are sticking around about a week to treat old Dragstedt."

CHAPTER II

The Martian Ship

BY the next morning, the entire Eighth Army Corps was on the move, swarming from all directions toward Alliance, Nebraska. Its airplanes, and also two squadrons of Navy hydroplanes from the Great Lakes Training Station, were at Alliance by daybreak.

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Field artillery and tanks on flat-cars came in on the railroads from the East, West, and South. From four directions came trucks loaded with men and small equipment.

By noon, Alliance looked like the center of a war zone. The sky hummed with planes. Tanks clanked along the roads, and motorized artillery pointed its long, keen noses at the sky. Trim, khaki-clad detachments clicked precisely along the pavements, their rifle-barrels all neatly parallel. The entire division was mobilized. It was being strung out in a new-moon shaped line, thickest in the center, and the points feeling outward, to surround the object as soon as it was found.

The airplanes located it early in the afternoon. It was described as an egg-shaped affair as big as an ocean-liner, located in a hollow in the sand hills, practically where Ronald Worth had predicted it would be found.

The young captain in command of the airplane squadron from the Great Lakes Navy Base, saluted General Barry, the Commander of the expedition, and stood in front of him waiting for orders. He could not conceal a restlessness, stepping from one foot to the other, even though trying hard to stand rigid.

The grizzled old General smiled.

"What is the Captain jittery about?" he asked.

"Begging the General's pardon," the Captain said in embarrassment, "I am awaiting orders to bomb the space-ship. It is just a pippin of a target. We could smash it in thirty seconds—"

"What about the radium?" the General interrupted.

The Captain's face suddenly fell, and he stood there puzzled.

"Do you know," the General continued, "that the entire nation's supply of radium is inside that vessel. If you throw explosives down there, you will scatter several million dollars' worth of precious stuff out in the sand. It would cost as much money and take as much time to recover it, as it did to make it in the first place."

"Yes, Sir!" replied the Captain meekly. "We've got a job on hand!"

IN the modest residence section of Lincoln, Nebraska, three swift cars that had just dashed across the town from the airport, drew up in front of Dragstedt's deserted little house. General Barry, his aides, and a squad of guards tramped into the house.

There, in the room of apparatus which old Dragstedt had built, sat Ronald Worth, high-school student and paper-carrier. Sleepiness showed in his eyes, and at his elbow were partly consumed bottles of milk and plates of cheese and crackers.

"Ronald Worth calling Professor Dragstedt! Ronald Worth calling Professor Dragstedt! Will you please answer! It will be to your interest to communicate with us!"

The boy's voice droned monotonously on, uninterrupted by the entry of the men into the room. Then he stopped, took a drink of milk, and put his hand on the six keys. The queer musical drone started and whined monotonously on. The military men stood silently about the room.

"You are sure that no other operator could take this over?" General Barry asked.

"I'd have to teach him. It would take time. Took me months to get on to it," the boy answered. "This is different from ordinary radios. And common radios won't tune with those of the Martians."

"You look tired," the General said.

Suddenly the boy stiffened, and took his hand away from the keys. The mu-

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sical drone continued, in a different rhythm.

"He is answering. Wouldn't answer on the telephone, but bit on the *cw* at once." Ronald was elated.

"Tell him," said General Barry, "to tell these Martians, that if they give us back our radium, we shall treat them royally, entertain them, show them the Earth; and then let them go home unharmed, with a gift of enough radium for their purpose."

The *cw* transmitter hummed awhile; and there were stirs of impatience among the soldiers who filled the room. After a while, the boy spoke again.

"The best I can make out of these answers, Sir," he said, "is that the Martians refuse to recognize us as intelligent beings. They refuse to deal with us. They think we are just some sort of animals."

"You tell him, then," the General directed, "that we have got them surrounded on land and in the air. We shall not permit them to rise, and shall simply lay siege to them until they starve. Do not be alarmed when we put a small shell through the skin of their vessel; that will be to keep them from rising out into space. Advise them again, that they will be better off if they surrender."

The *cw* spoke again for a period; and again the boy spoke, with some excitement in his voice:

"Apparently the shell has arrived, and blown a hole in the nose of their ship. Dragstedt didn't think it did any damage. But the Martians have become very busy about something, moving jerkily about. The shell-hole seems to have interfered with their arrangements for decreased gravitation inside the vessel. He doesn't know how many there are, but over a hundred. He says they are disturbed."

"That was Grigsby of the 110th Field Artillery that disturbed them."

"SWOOP" Martin, the crack observation pilot, circled around over the scene of operations, at 30,000 feet. He had to use an oxygen helmet, fitted with binocular glasses. But he was invisible and inaudible from below.

He could see the gleaming, egg-shaped hull, nestling in the sand like some child's toy; and around it, the dotted, splotched, irregular circle formed by the Eighth Army Corps. As he watched, a puff of smoke came from one of the splotches below; in a moment a puff of smoke appeared at the smaller end of the egg; and when it cleared, a small black hole remained in the metal. He reported it all promptly to headquarters by radio.

The next thing that happened was that a square of metal opened in the side of the vessel, like a door, and an odd thing stepped out of it, and started walking out across the sand away from the ship.

In another second, a dozen airplanes, far below him, swooped down toward the thing. The faint patter of their machine-guns came up to him. The mechanical thing that had come out of the vessel careened over on its side and lay still. The door in the side of the hull quickly closed.

For some minutes nothing happened, and then a row of little round ports appeared higher up off the ground. "Swoop" Martin could not see anything else happen, except that there were a dozen loud explosions, with flashes of fire in the air, and the airplanes which had fusilladed the Martian coming out of his ship, all exploded there beneath him, and only a litter of small fragments dropped on down to the ground. Then, systematically down there in that investing circle, one battery after another blew up in a flash and a cloud of

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smoke, huge gun barrels and artillery wheels flying high in the air, mingled with the bodies of men, whirling down to be buried in a cloud of sand.

A few seconds later there were scores of explosions in the air, as distant airplanes blew up. There must have been communication from them to the ground, because some of the batteries in the second and third lines banged loudly two or three times before they finally blew up. Their marksmanship was good. Shells shrieked across the interval and huge holes were ripped in the shining side of the Martian vessel.

However, the Martians were the swifter. Before vital damage had been done to their vessel, there was not a tank, not a field gun, not an intact infantry company left. The Eighth Army Corps had been wiped out and was represented only by a few stragglers staggering in the sand.

"God!" exclaimed "Swoop" Martin, up in his plane above range of the damage. "All of that to pay for a couple of ounces of radium!"

As he circled around to head for safer regions, he could see repair proceeding rapidly in the holes in the side of the Martian vessel.

AIRPLANES from the Tenth Army Corps Area were on the spot in the morning, practically hitting their "ceiling" in order to keep out of the way of the Martians' destructive reach. They had expected to arrive and find the thing gone. But it was still there, and the shell-holes all repaired.

So, the Tenth Division moved up to fill the place of the Eighth. A few scouts first took their posts. As nothing happened, more and more men trickled in, and were slowly followed by heavy equipment. In a few days the line was again complete, among the blackened ruins of their predecessors. Their orders were:

"Surround the Martians. Keep quiet. Take no action against them unless they try to rise."

Now, those men who had filtered up to their positions at night with pounding hearts, expecting to be suddenly wiped out at any moment, were getting tired of week after week of inactivity. Army discipline, always irksome, was doubly so in the heat and the sand. There was sand in their clothes, sand in their hair, sand in their ears, sand in their food. There were hot winds, and nothing to do but wait all day and wonder what the airplanes above had to report. The enlisted personnel were not the only ones who were restless. There were constant, worried conferences in the General Headquarters tent.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed General Johnson, Commander of the Tenth Army Corps, one hot day, when weariness was at its height.

The headquarters staff deliberated long and carefully before the officers finally dispersed, each to his own sandy quarters. There was much tapping of the Royal Portable typewriter and sealing of secret orders during the next few days. There was code communication with Washington by radio.

Finally, one dark night, the men were overjoyed by orders to get up and move. A few moments later they were dismayed to find that their progress was going to be backwards. They were going away from the enemy. They pounded through the sand until they reached a paved highway, and were then whisked away by trucks. By daybreak the Division was comfortably making camp in a country that was not sandhills. Eventually it was discovered that the little city in the distance was Ravenna.

"Swoop" Martin, transferred to the Tenth Division, saluted General John-

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son, as the latter stepped out of his car.

"Ready for orders, Sir," he said.

"Lieutenant Martin, there are no orders. You may do this if you care to volunteer, but you will not be ordered to do it."

"Instructions, I meant, Sir," said "Swoop" Martin.

In a few moments he was on the run for his plane, which stood ready for him.

CHAPTER III

The Attack on the Martians

"SWOOP" MARTIN in his monoplane made circles around over the Martian space-ship like a hawk. He swept around lower and lower. At a height of about 3,000 feet, he flew away to the distance of a half mile, and then dived steeply downward, toward the Martian vessel. A few hundred feet above it, he turned sharply upward again, making a sort of V. At the bottom of the V, a small black object left the scout plane, and described a parabola, striking the Martian vessel amidships. A ragged hole appeared, and then a dull explosion.

"Swoop" Martin was climbing fast, and thinking every moment was his last one; expecting to be blown to atoms any second. But until he was, he determined, he would go through with it. He guided his plane, watched his board, and went steeply upwards.

Finally, when he was gasping for breath, he leveled off, and put on his oxygen mask. He looked down below. Everything was the same as before. He was puzzled.

He cruised around awhile, thinking things over, and shook his head. He swiftly reported what had happened and asked for further orders. The General's message was to the effect that he did not wish to give an order of that kind; but that if Lieutenant Martin wished to volunteer to repeat his maneuver, it might be a good idea.

Down, down, the plane swooped again, toward the tiny globule nestling in the sand, and sent another bomb hurthing down from the front of its V-shaped path, and again fled upwards into the heights. Again a jagged hole was torn in the top of the space ship; again "Swoop" Martin expected the worst as he climbed his way back to the height; again he waited in vain for something to happen, and nothing happened.

Back at the camp near Ravenna, a group of men stirred. In fifteen minutes, a dozen swift cars filled with officers and men, two high speed tanks, and two high-speed four-inch field-pieces, were headed toward the Martian ship. They covered the ground rapidly, and by noon were on the site of the previous camp from which they had besieged the Martian vessel. The field-guns were set up and trained; a dozen men climbed into the two tanks, loaded with machine guns and hand-grenades. Above, a dozen airplanes droned, and made swooping circles, much like hawks.

The tanks started off, throwing up clouds of sand, and dashed at high speed, straight toward the shining side of the Martian vessel. Their crews were tense, expecting to be blotted out instantly. But nothing happened. The old General sat at the front porthole of one of the tanks, watching ahead, gazing at the narrowing space between the tank and the Martian ship. Those gleaming walls began to seem very close, and the General expected the catastrophe any moment. But they roared and clanked onward, and still nothing happened. The airplanes came lower, till the roar of their motors was heard above the noise of the tanks. Still nothing happened. Behind, the men at the

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cannons watched through field glasses and waited at their radios, ready to rain a shower of shells on the Martian vessel at the least suspicion. But nothing happened.

Finally, they were under the very lee of the metal hulk. It towered above them like a skyscraper, and extended in both directions like a mountain range. Still nothing happened.

"All out!" the General ordered, as the tanks stopped.

Their feet crunching in the sand, their hands full of grenades, they made their way slowly alongside the ship. One hundred yards. Two hundred yards, three hundred yards, they walked along, and still there appeared no way of getting inside. The holes that "Swoop" Martin had made were on the upper surface, and there was no way to climb.

"Try a grenade," the General ordered.

They all backed off. There was a crash of flying fragments, but no damage to the wall.

"A four-inch shell, then!"

The only communication with the gunners was now by flags. The General's order was rapidly wig-wagged to them. The General and his men hurried to shelter behind a sand hummock, now genuinely expecting complete annihilation. The gun crew placed the first shot too short and merely threw up sand. The second was a little high, tearing open the metal plates of the hull about twenty feet above the ground. The third shot ripped open a hole that they could easily walk into.

FOR a moment the General contemplated with interest the twisted and blackened edges of the shiny, white metal that was unknown to him. Then he recollected that they were in danger, he and his little group of men, peering into the depths of the dark opening. There was some huge machinery visible, a long corridor with a bright, flat surface at the end of it. Nothing had as yet happened to them. They were still alive.

The General pushed back one of the men who was edging into the opening. He claimed the privilege of being the first to walk into danger. The men with grenades and hand-machine guns crowded behind him. The General found himself walking down a small corridor, and the men filed behind him. The corridor soon became a bridge out in a vast void, black and filled with machinery of enormous proportions. Then again it became a corridor, and the bright surface was a wall turning at right angles.

It seemed that they spent hours walking about with pounding hearts and thumping heads, expecting every moment to be attacked in some unknown way from dark ambush. There was endless machinery, large and small, everywhere.

Finally, at the end of a climb up a long stairway, they came to an open space, at what they guessed to be about the middle of the ship. It looked as though they had found the "living quarters" at last. They were in a vestibule. In front of them was a metal door with a glass window, through which they could look into a vast, ovoid, rotunda-like room or hall.

All efforts to open the door failed. There seemed to be no lock against which to direct operations. The metal of the door was firm as a mountain against all their blows. So, they all stepped back, and a well-aimed grenade tore the door open wide enough for them to go through, their ears singing from the roar of the explosion. They went through cautiously, two experienced enlisted-men first, with their rifles at ready, then the officers with their pis-

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tols in their hands.

The lighting seemed to them rather dim, though it had the quality of daylight. Probably it corresponded to the lower intensity of illumination as found on the surface of Mars.

"Crash!" went the rifle of a soldier at something that moved slightly on a couch across the room, a hundred yards away. Whatever it was that had moved, jerked as though it had been kicked, shuddered a moment, and lay still.

The group stood huddled together near the door, looked around and waited. Not a sound, not a stir in the vast room. It had all the proportions of some huge Coliseum, though none of the ponderous evidences of constructional difficulties. They had time to examine the place. About two hundred cots or couches stood around its walls. It appeared that originally they had been arranged in precise order, but now there was confusion. All of them were occupied by little, shriveled, flat-looking bodies, that looked astonishingly human. They were small and frail-looking. On closer inspection they looked especially human because the faces were so very old and sad. The skin was blue, leathery, and wrinkled.

In the middle of the place was a cluster of some kind of apparatus: a foundation-pillar, a platform, elongated, casing-like structures of metal pointing in all directions like telescopes or projectors, wheels, knobs, and levers for control. It may possibly have been the control station for running the ship. Near one end of the space into which they were looking, three or four of the mechanical contrivances in which these creatures traveled around when they were on earth, lay propped up in a heap, and a motionless body was still strapped in one of them.

"All beds occupied but one, sir!" the veteran Sergeant said; "and that must belong to him," pointing to the one in the machine. "Not one of them is stirring."

"Just the same," the wary old General said, "the four of you go around and prod everyone of them to see if there is any life left. This is no time to get shot from behind."

A keen-looking officer with a lieutenant-colonel's leaves on his shoulders, was also looking the bodies over. They were indeed all dead. He walked up to one and another, and even thumped and prodded several with professional skill and interest. The General watched him in mute inquiry.

"Well, doctor," he finally asked, "what killed them?"

"Radiation!" the medical officer replied. "As I see it, they had developed no natural protection against radiation because they live under-ground, and because there is so little radiation of any kind on Mars, both because of its distance from the sun and because of the scarcity of its radioactive minerals. Apparently there was no warning in their mathematics, of the terrific power of radium against their own flesh, even through the lead walls of its containers. See the deep destruction of skin and tissue on some of the older cases."

THE General stood a moment, lost in thought. Then he sent two men back to the main force with orders that proper guards be brought up for the Martian ship.

"Now we'll look for the radium," he said. "It can't be far from here."

The men stuck close together as they moved here and there. It was a jittery place. The vastness and dimness of it, the two-hundred odd dead Martians, the jungles of incredibly huge machinery filling the great spaces all around them, between them and honest daylight, with God only knew what lurk-

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ing in their depths, were conditions to which they were unaccustomed. They would have preferred a concrete human enemy in front of them no matter how well armed. They went to one of the doors that were let into the wall at intervals, then to another, then to several in succession.

The doors were of the same character as the first one they had encountered. There seemed no way to open them except by explosives, and this for the present they hesitated to do. The light from the rotunda penetrated the glass windows of the doors only a short distance, and was lost among the huge bulks and dizzy reaches of machinery.

Suddenly a harsh cackle sounded behind them.

They wheeled around and stood petrified, the enlisted men with their rifles automatically aimed in the direction from which the laugh had come.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" rasped a harsh, dry laugh. "Go ahead and have a shot at me boys, and see how much harm it does!"

They saw Dragstedt standing there his eyes gleaming.

There was a moment's pause. The General whispered:

"He's insane."

"Who wouldn't be?" the medical officer said.

The madman's dry cackle rose again to the lofty ceiling:

"Ha! ha! So you think you can get the best of me, eh? Look what I can do to you!"

He whirled a little wheel, which slowly swung one of the long casings so that it pointed at a dead Martian on a couch. He moved his hand to something else, and an intense red ray shot across the intervening space. The Martian and his bed simply flew into pieces, and the fragments also disappeared, leaving behind them faint clouds of smoky vapor. A dull thud shook the room.

"Look! and look! and look!" the madman shouted excitedly, aiming at one after another of the Martians, blowing them into smoke with red streaks and dull thuds.

Crash! went a soldier's rifle as the ray began to swing too close to them.

The soldier dropped his rifle in one hand, and held the other to his head as though to nurse a headache.

"Swipe me! I could hit a pinhead at that distance!" he moaned.

"Fire at him again!" the General ordered. They all watched closely.

Crash! went the rifle. At the same time a small puff of smoke appeared in the thin air about a foot from Professor Dragstedt, and in line with his heart. The bullet had been caught and disintegrated by some field of force.

Again the long, cackling laugh:

"You see, I've got you!"

"Yes," said the General. "What do you want?"

"I'm sailing this ship to Mars," the Professor said. "I'm going to sell them the radium there. I'm going to be rich. I'm going to get power! I'm going to rule. I'll be the biggest—"

"But what about us?" the General interrupted.

The madman's face became crafty.

"You will come with me, and be my royal Guard," he orated. "Or—" he waited thoughtfully a moment as though a new and more interesting idea had struck him—

"—or, I'll blast you into smoke. What would you rather do? Go to Mars, or get flashed into nothing?"

Someone in the group whispered:

"But the ship's got holes in it. If he goes out into space, we're all goners in a few seconds."

Another voice whispered:

"Does he really believe he can handle

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this ship? And get it to Mars? Looks complicated to me, and I'm—"

The old General's head probably worked faster than anyone else's.

"You go to hell!" he thundered to the mad professor. "We'll get you yet, and court-martial you and shoot you."

Professor Dragstedt gave a shrill yell.

"Whoopee! All aboard for Mars! Here we go!"

He adjusted a number of little wheels, lumbered all the casings into different positions, and took hold of a large, heavy lever.

The men looked at each other blankly. In a few seconds the cold of space would penetrate into their bone marrow, and all the air out of their bodies would be lost as an infinitesimal whiff in the limitless void. Irresistibly they turned to Dragstedt again.

With a wild grin on his face, he leaned back, and gave a long, hard pull at the heavy lever in front of him.

Suddenly they were pressed to the floor with an immense weight. The sensation was over in a second. During that second the spectacle in front of them took place. A fountain of a dozen streams of red beams played for an instant at steep angles, crisscrossing each other and forming a hyperboloid. When they subsided, the tower in the middle of the room was a molten mass, and the only trace of Professor Dragstedt was a whiff of smoky vapor, slowly dissipating itself in faint swirls.

DO INSECTS THINK?

This is a question that has been often asked by those who have chanced to observe the apparently intelligent actions of a colony of bees, or of ants, or of wasps. And it is one that deserves deep consideration.

Among the higher invertebrates, namely the bees, ants, wasps and other social insects, there is a complex behavior which has been interpreted by some to imply a consciousness comparable with that of man. Others have emphasized the instinctive character of the activities of these insects and have been content to consider the higher insects as mere automata.

The insects represent a line of development divergent from the course of evolution that has culminated in man, and it is difficult to compare the insect mind with human consciousness. Either the performances of bees and ants are largely reflex or must be attributed to a very complex effective consciousness.

Whatever it is, it is perhaps most safe to say that the process is anything but human in character. Size of brain seems to have been very important in man, and from the lowest forms of life to the highest, brain size has increased. Therefore, judging from the tinyness of the insect brain, it cannot be ranked very high in the ability to think.

COMING NEXT MONTH

In the March, 1971 *AMAZING STORIES*— The novel everyone will be talking about *next* year, Hugo and Nebula Award-winner Ursula K. Le Guin's THE LATHE OF HEAVEN! This one *can't* be missed!

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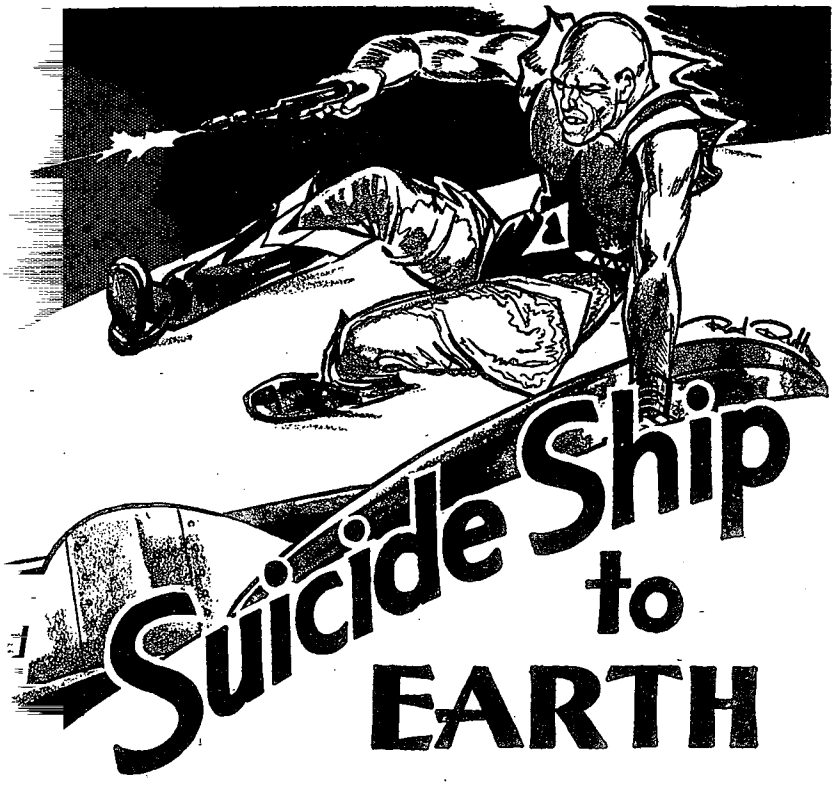

Suicide Ship to EARTH

The owners of the *Princess* had no intention of making port with her—but forgot to tell Tom Wade

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

STANDING there on the space wharf, First Rocketeer Tommy Wade clinked the two Martian *klekas* in his pocket against each other and gazed resignedly down at the miserable hulk which was to be his problem child for the next thirty days.

"Hell," Wade muttered, "I suppose I'm lucky even to have a berth like this."

She was named *S.S. Princess*, and was as ancient and as generally decrepit an old tub as he had ever seen masquerading under the guise of a space freighter in all his ten years of void voyaging.

Wade sighed, tilting his frayed space officer's cap back on his thatch of straw colored hair. His face was youthful and rugged in spite of the gaunt hollows in his cheeks which were the result of very slim eating in the past few months.

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Then he grinned, teeth white against the space bronze of his skin, starting down the duralloy planks that led to the slip where the *Princess* was moored.

There was an oiler, sunning himself against the rusty deck rail of the squalid space ship, and he looked sleepily disinterested as Wade approached.

"Hey there, Mister," Wade shouted. "Can you tell me where I'll find the master of this, uh, freighter?"

The oiler blinked his eyes for an instant, watching Wade traverse the gangplank to the worn deck. Then, spitting over the side, he jerked his right arm and thumb wordlessly over his shoulder.

Wade saw the dingy Master's cabin which the oiler had indicated. The door was slightly ajar. He took a deep breath and stepped over to it, rapping once on its rusty surface.

"Come in, come in!" a voice thundered.

Wade stepped across the threshold. He saw an undershirted, red-faced, white-haired old man sitting behind a paper-littered desk on which rested a bottle and two glasses. The red-faced old fellow weighed at least two hundred pounds, and Wade was certain that he couldn't be taller than five-six. His nose looked like a big puffed wart.

"You're Captain Toby?" Wade asked.

"And who else might I be?" The undershirted old man sighed and leaned back in his chair, his button eyes obviously sizing up his visitor.

"I'm Wade," Tommy declared. "Your new first rocketeer. Your owners told you to expect me, I hope."

The old captain sat forward. "And would you be having your papers along?" he asked.

Wade nodded, reaching into his frayed white tunic pocket and pulling forth a sheaf. He handed them to the captain. Then, from another pocket, he pulled out a square card.

"And here's my ticket," Wade added. Captain Toby took it, and sat back again in his chair, eyes flickering over the papers. After a minute he looked up.

"Like as not they're all right," he rasped. "But I'll warn you now, Mister, we'll be expecting a miracle man as well as a first rocketeer. You'll need to be knowing your rockets to move this tub."

Wade thought for an instant of the two lonely *klekas* in his pocket, then said: "I'm just the First to keep them running."

Old Captain Toby smiled wryly.

"That's what I'm liking about youth," he sighed, "plenty of optimism." His button eyes regarded Wade for an instant. "I was optimistic once. But, of course, I was as young as you are, then."

Wade grinned back.

"Shall I sign the ship's papers, now, sir?"

Captain Toby fished into a lower drawer of his dirty desk, finally bringing forth a much worn ledger.

"All right, Mister Wade, you'll be signing at the top there, and the bargain's cinched."

For one last instant, Wade hesitated. Then he took the pen and bent over the ledger . . .

IT WAS LATE afternoon when Wade, grease stained and sweaty, reported to Captain Toby on the bridge of the tramp space freighter. Working only on side rocket power, they had managed to snort and bank their way erratically out into space shortly before noon. But that had only been with the help of some prodigious coaxing of the rocket motors during the better part of

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the morning.

Captain Toby was busy with a pencil over a bridge chart, and he looked up as Wade spoke.

"Captain," Wade blurted, "I've done my damnedest, sir, and I still can't get those blankety-blank portside rockets hitting straight."

"You wouldn't be losing some of that youthful enthusiasm, now would you?" Captain Toby asked solemnly.

"But we're working only under starboard power," Wade protested, crimsoning. "If we're too long on those ancient tubes, this whole damned packet is going to blow up in our faces!"

Captain Toby pushed his visored cap back on his forehead and put his pudgy fists on the chart table. He looked up at Wade soberly. "Look now, lad," he said. "I know you've not the easiest task in the cosmos down there, but those 'damned' portside and stern rockets *have* to be hitting straight before we enter the Heaviside Layer!"

Wade wiped the sweat from his forehead with a greasy right palm. He shook his head doubtfully.

"I can try," he said, "but I can't promise. For the life of me," his voice became suddenly strained from the tension he was under, "I can't see why they ever commissioned an old space scow like this in the first place. Why don't your owners give you repairs? God knows they're needed down there!"

Captain Toby put his hand on Wade's shoulder.

"And why have you signed on this packet, lad?"

Wade flushed, remembering the fact that he'd been down to his last *klekas*, and hadn't had even the offer of a berth for months until this chance presented itself.

But Captain Toby went on before he could speak.

"Exactly, lad, and that's about the same reason for me being here. This is the first command I've had in two years. I couldn't be choosy about such things as necessary repairs. I've a wife, and two youngsters, needing food."

Wade nodded.

"I'll do my best, sir," he said shortly. He turned and started down the rusted duralloy bridge companionway.

WADE was down on the deck, and turning to enter the rocket rooms, when a glittering object, hoisted high on the rusty duralloy rail davits caught his eye. He stopped abruptly, staring.

"Well I'll be—" he muttered in amazement. His eyes suddenly narrowed. He stepped over to the rail, gazing up at the sleek, polished, gleaming sides of an exceptionally modern space lifeboat.

He pushed back his cap on his straw-colored mop of hair, shaking his head in perplexity. The super-sleek lifecraft was a tiny, streamlined, luxury space liner in itself. From the exhaust furrows on the belly of the craft, and from the very shape of the shining silver duralloy tubes that ran along the side of the ship, Wade knew that it was powered by atomic motors. Powered by atomic motors, when the *S.S. Princess* itself was so decrepit that it worked on the oldest type of rockets!

"This," Wade muttered bewilderedly, "is the most cockeyed note yet. Here our rocket tubes are ready to blow up at any moment, and every last seam on this stinking tub is likely to give from the very force of our forward motion—and then the owners of this barge have to toss all their cash around in fitting out this extra special, more than modern, space lifeboat!"

He shook his head again, still goggling in amazement at the craft. There was a cough behind him, and Wade wheeled. It was the same lackadaisical

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oiler whom he'd seen as he first came aboard that morning.

The oiler touched his cap in what might have been intended as a salute.

"Nice craft, isn't she, sir?" he observed.

"Wade looked at the fellow, a huge, hulking, bald headed, flat-nosed man.

"She certainly is a trim job," he answered.

The oiler looked at him lazily, but Wade felt a certain appraising scrutiny in that glance. The flat-nosed fellow seemed to be reading his mind, for he said:

"She ain't ours, sir, if that's what you're thinking." He chuckled. "The owners of the *Princess* wouldn't spend their dough that wasteful like. "We're just carrying this life baby for a shipment delivery."

Wade nodded.

"Then why isn't this packed away down in the hold?" he demanded.

The oiler grinned. His teeth were jagged and yellow.

"There ain't enough room down there, sir. Our other cargo takes up all the hold space. So they strung this lifecraft atop deck. About the only place left to carry her."

Suddenly Wade's doubts vanished. That explained it. He grinned.

"Okay, I was wondering about it, that's all. Better get below. We'll be needing all you boys pretty soon. Have to get our stern and portside rocket tubes cleared by the time we hit Heaviside."

The oiler touched his cap again.

"Yessir," he answered. Wade watched him turn away, faintly conscious of the slight tinge of derision in his eyes. Then the big fellow had disappeared down the companionway leading to the rocket rooms, and for an instant, Wade took a last look at the trim, streamlined life spaceship.

And it was while Wade took that last fleeting appraisal of the ultra modern craft, that he heard the tapping on the forward bulkhead of it. The tapping that came from the inside!

Wade froze motionless, holding his breath as he listened unbelievingly. No—it couldn't be—but it was, and he heard it once more!

Rap, click, rap, click, rap, click, rap, click.

The startled bewilderment left Wade's eyes, to be replaced by sudden grim suspicion. He stepped forward, tapping three times on the outside of the sleek hull.

Rap, click, rap, click, rap, click, rap!

"I'll damned well see what *this* is all about!" Wade muttered. And he stepped forward to the lowering electrowinch that would enable him to let the craft down on its davits to a point where he could put his resolve into action. . . .

KERMIT KEITH, senior partner of the space ship cargo company of Keith, Barlowe and Mackay, sat behind a cheap glassicade desk in the main offices of said firm—located on Mars—picking his dirty teeth with the corner of an envelope.

Kermit Keith was a small scrawny fellow, with dark black hair that belied the yellow wrinkles in his neck and the crows feet beneath his beady little eyes. His hair looked as if it might have been plastered or painted atop his round skull. The tunic he wore was tailored of expensive material but lost much of its richness because of the fact that it clung to his body like a loose sheet.

At this particular moment Kermit Keith was waiting. And in the next instant the person for whom he waited stepped in through the door of his dingy office.

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Kermit Keith stopped picking his teeth and looked up.

"Hello, John," he smiled. "Word come in?"

The intruder, John Barlowe, second partner in the firm, was fat red-faced and white-haired. He had a long, slim nose, and angelic blue eyes. If it weren't for the fact that he wore especially expensive tunic cloth—and much more jauntily than Keith—and carried a shining cane of Venusian snakewood, he might have looked like one of the jolly hermit monks of Saturn.

"I just got a telaboard flash," Barlowe announced in deep rich tones that sharply contrasted with his partner's squeaky speech. "The *Princess* left on schedule this morning. Everything's fine. Just dandy. We'll be plenty rich inside of another month, Kermit m'boy. Plenty rich!"

"And the insurance papers; you checked through those very carefully, John?" Keith squeaked.

"With a fine toothed comb, m'boy. There's no way the company can wriggle out of the terms we made with them. A very clever bit of wording took care of that." Barlowe beamed. He rubbed his red hands.

"Smart deal, signing on that poverty stricken young first rocketeer," Keith falsettoed in compliment. "He seems to have been able to stir the hulk of the *Princess* into motion. Couldn't collect our insurance, you know, if we weren't able to get her out into space."

Barlowe chortled.

"We ought to give him a commission on the deal."

Keith smirked, then squeaked.

"I don't think he'll be back to collect it. Or the drunken old ass, Captain Toby, for that matter." He giggled. "It was a riot. He's been grounded here on Mars for damned near two years. No berths open for a guzzler as old as he is. He just about snapped my hand off when I offered him the command of the *S.S. Princess*. Didn't even ask what his pay for the run was to be. He figures he'll be able to get back to his wife and brats on Earth, and maybe get a permanent assignment with our line if he brings the *Princess* through on the schedule we gave him."

Barlowe smiled, and pulled a thick Venusian cigar from the breast pocket of his expensive tunic. He lighted it reflectively, then added:

"Most of the rest of the crew acted the same way. They were all wharf rats pathetically eager to get any kind of berths on any kind of space-going rat traps."

KENNETH KEITH permitted himself a last giggle at this, then became silkily serious.

"What about Mackay, John? He's all set to sign over, isn't he?"

Barlowe nodded. "Glad to get out of the firm. He'll sign over for practically nothing. And in so doing, the ass will lose himself a fortune."

"He's rich anyway," Keith squeaked. "If it weren't for his childish desire to play spacefaring financier; he'd never have put a *kleka* in with us. As it was, he didn't bother us any, thank God, and only showed up when we needed more capital."

Barlowe nodded.

"He had his radium interests to keep him plenty busy," he acknowledged.

"They're still big enough to keep him from indulging in his frustrated desire to sit at a desk and order space ships around the void like a master navigator."

"Thank heavens," Keith observed. "Otherwise he'd have caught on to our profit and loss system long ago."

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Barlowe chuckled again, his angelic blue eyes twinkling.

"That old profit and loss system, Kermit m'boy, will be planetary peanuts compared to this deal we've got now."

"Have Stover, Quanes, and Janess got their orders straight?" Keith changed tack abruptly. "Do they know what to do, and when to do it?"

Barlowe looked hurt.

"Why, Kermit, I personally gave them each their instructions. Stover is to see to it that the young first rocketeer doesn't embarrass the plans by turning genius and nursing the *Princess* through the entire voyage."

Keith frowned, as if trying to remember.

"Stover was the huge, hulking, flat-nosed pug ugly you signed on as oiler?"

Barlowe nodded.

"The one with the sleepy eyes. He's a good man for what we'll need." Barlowe took a satisfied puff from his Venusian cigar and continued, "Quanes is signed on as quartermaster. He'll make damned certain that no one does any probing around below the hold to see what cargo's being carried. And when the time comes, he'll touch off that cargo in a blast that'll send every asteroid south of Saturn skirting every which way."

"And what about Janess?" Keith demanded.

"He's signed on as second officer. That's just as a final precaution. Old Captain Toby might get too conscientious about wanting to bring the *Princess* all the way to Earth. It'll be while Janess is on the bridge and in command that our fireworks start. Besides, he's an expert navigator, and he'll be the one to pilot the new lifecraft when the three of them abandon the ship," Barlowe explained with the smug satisfaction of an executive who has taken care of every last minor detail.

"Splendid," Keith's falsetto squeaked admiringly, "we're all set then. There's nothing that can block our pla—"

BARLOWE, by a fit of extraordinarily loud coughing, cut off his scrawny partner's sentence completely. And as he coughed he jabbed a warning finger in the direction of the door. Then, loudly, he said:

"Say, Kermit, was there someone knocking? Why, I'll bet it's Mackay. He's arrived ahead of time!" As he spoke he moved to the door and opened it swiftly to reveal a short, stocky, gray-moustached, jauntily-tailored gentleman, just in the process of raising his hand to the door to knock.

Barlowe seized the stocky newcomer by the hand, booming a hearty greeting as he did so.

"Well, well, Mackay. Glad to see you, old man. Glad to see you!"

The short, stocky, gray-moustached newcomer—who was, in line, the third partner in the space cargo firm—gave Barlowe a sharp glance, and after a minute took his hand from the other's hearty grasp.

Kermit Keith was on his feet, beaming.

"Well, well, Peter Mackay. It's a pleasure to see you, Peter. We were afraid that you wouldn't have time to get down here from your radium interests to—"

Peter Mackay cut him off briskly.

"Really wouldn't have had time ordinarily. But that madcap daughter of mine is off on another one of her vanishing acts, and her wanderings led to somewhere in this vicinity. So I thought I'd kill two birds with one stone. I can take care of you gentlemen, then I can find Joy and bring her back home by the scruff of her beautiful young neck."

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Barlowe laughed mechanically.

"Well, that's a relief, Peter. I was sure from the look on your face that you were worried about something. And for an awful minute I thought you might have reconsidered our offer, or at least have been dubious about it."

Peter Mackay looked up sharply.

"Why should I reconsider it? It seems fair enough, and I've had my lawyers look at the papers. They've been wanting me to give up this enterprise for some time anyway."

Kermit Keith joined Barlowe in jovial laughter. Laughter intended to indicate to Peter Mackay that they were only kidding about even the remote possibility of his not accepting their offer.

"Have you got the papers?" Peter Mackay demanded. "I'm in a great hurry, you know."

Kermit Keith reached down into a desk drawer, and with lightning speed whipped a sheaf of forms out onto the desk.

"Right here," he squeaked, "right here, Peter. We've got them all ready for you to sign."

Two minutes later, Peter Mackay looked up, and set his pen down on the desk.

"There you are, gentlemen. You've bought out my interest in the firm. Frankly, although there's never been a great deal of profit in it for me, it's been lots of fun. However," he sighed, "my other interests kept me from giving any of my time to this, so I suppose it's just as well."

"We've enjoyed the prestige of your name, and your friendship, Peter," Kermit Keith piped.

"You bet, old boy," boomed Barlowe, grabbing Mackay's hand and pumping it.

"Well, gentlemen, I must rush off. I've got to find that harebrained daughter of mine and take her back home. You understand, I hope?" Peter Mackay said. He had moved to the door.

"Certainly, Peter," Barlowe agreed. "And we'll forward your draft to your lawyers in the morning. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye," squeaked Keith.

Peter Mackay nodded, and stepped out of the door. Barlowe and Keith watched him leave, then—with simultaneously ear splitting grins—they turned to each other and shook hands triumphantly. . . .

III

OLD Captain Toby tumbled his fat bulk down the bridge ladder two rungs at a time. Then, breathlessly, but not pausing, he turned and moved up the deck to his cabin. Puffing heavily, he threw open the door and stepped inside the dingy room.

Tommy Wade stood there in the middle of the cabin, facing him. His lean young face was gravely troubled.

"You wanted me?" Captain Toby asked. "Your message said you wanted to see me in privacy, down here."

Wade nodded.

"Right, sir. We've a new problem on our hands."

"Not another rocket breakdown?" Captain Toby groaned.

Wade shook his head.

"No, not that. I've discovered a stowaway on board the *Princess*."

"What?" the old captain was properly astonished. "Where is he?" he spluttered. "Where did you find him?"

"It isn't a he," Wade said. "It's a her. And I found her hiding in the streamlined space lifeship we're carrying as deck cargo. She'd been hiding in there, and if I hadn't gotten her out in time, she'd probably have suffocated."

Captain Toby's astonishment gave

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way to incredulity. "Where is she?" he began. "I'll—"

"Here I am, Captain," a cool, liquid, feminine voice broke in.

The old captain wheeled, his eyes going to the corner of the room where a red tuniced girl had been standing unnoticed during the preliminaries of their conversation. She was, Toby saw in a glance, a young and very pretty girl. Her hair was blond, and hung down to her shoulders like a halo. Her eyes were green and lively, and her smile —which she was now using with her utmost endeavor to charm—was as white as starshine.

"Well—" the old man choked. "Uhmph, hah, er—"

"I hope you'll let me explain, Captain," the girl pleaded smilingly.

"I was going to throw her in the brig, sir," Wade began, cheeks reddening. "But, well, you can't do that to a—"

"To a pretty young girl," Captain Toby finished for him. "No, you really can't, Mister."

"I meant 'to a woman'," Wade protested, the color in his cheeks climbing. "You can't throw a woman in the brig."

THE old captain had regained most of his composure, and was gazing at the girl in a fashion that was far from disapproving. He turned to Wade, then.

"I'll agree with you, Mister, this is a problem we're having on our hands here."

"I'll pay for my passage when we reach Earth," the girl broke in earnestly. "Don't take me back."

Captain Toby looked at her.

"There'll be no turning back now, Lassie. You can be sure of that. We've done wonders to push this space scow this far, without turning back. Yes, you'll have to come along with us. It wouldn't be right to throw you over the side. Now, what would your name be?"

"She refused to tell me," Wade broke in angrily. "And to be frank about it, she fought like a tigress when I pulled her out of her hiding place."

The old captain's eyes twinkled.

"Is that right?" he asked the girl.

"He was nasty, and overbearing. I bit him on the finger," the girl flared. Her green eyes were flashing.

"If we're going to permit you to carry along as passenger," the old man said, "I think it only fair, now, that you give us your name and an explanation for your being here. Don't you agree, Miss?"

The girl hesitated. She glared at Wade for an instant.

"I'd never have told that roughneck," she said. "But you're a gentleman, Captain. If you give me your solemn promise not to telaflash a word about me, either to Mars or Earth, I'll tell you everything."

"She might be a criminal," Wade broke in angrily. "There's no need for us to make such a promise." He was still thinking of the finger she had bitten in their scuffle.

"No," Captain Toby disagreed, "she's not the criminal type to my mind. I think we've naught to lose through such a promise."

Wade reddened further under the amused contemplation of the old captain. He lapsed into a surly silence.

The girl brightened.

"Thank you, Captain." She paused, then went on. "It's not a very long story. You see, I've been brought up in surroundings which have always irritated me. Dull, stodgy, stuffy surroundings. My father is a very wealthy man. He tried to give me everything, of course, but never realized that he was depriving me of real happiness by confining me to the narrow life I had to

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live as a girl of a wealthy family."

"Well put, lassie," Captain Toby applauded. "You've common sense there."

The girl smiled charmingly, then went on. "All my life has been spent in a constant struggle with my father—who is a fine man, but misunderstanding about many things—to live the way I want to live. I wanted romance, glamor, adventure, excitement. But he was against it all. He had the idea that sending me all over the interplanetary chain on luxury line cruises, was giving me adventure, or excitement. I got quite fed up with it all. I was, ah, er—"

"Bored?" Wade spoke for the first time, and sarcastically.

The girl looked disdainful.

"Yes, bored. I was utterly bored. So I finally decided to set out on my own, stow away on a tramp space ship, see life and excitement and adventure as it really is."

The captain nodded solemnly.

"And that's your reason for being here, is it?"

The girl smiled.

"Yes, that's it exactly."

Old Captain Toby shook his head.

"I see. It sounds like an honest reason. Now, tell us your name, won't you?"

The girl hesitated for but an instant, then she said:

"Remember your promise?"

Captain Toby nodded.

"I do that. Go ahead, lassie, you're free to speak. I'll not telaflash your father, nor anyone else, till we reach Earth."

"My name," the girl blurted suddenly, "is Joy Mackay."

Captain Toby's red cheeks went suddenly sallow.

"And what would be your father's name?" he demanded chokingly.

"Peter Mackay."

Toby turned to Wade.

"And that would be the Peter Mackay of the firm which owns the *Princess*—the firm of Keith, Barlowe, and Mackay!"

"And this, this, this is his daugher?" Wade demanded flabbergasted.

Joy Mackay looked levelly at Wade and nodded, her smile acidly triumphant.

IV

SECOND OFFICER JANESS, of the *S.S. Princess,* shifted himself to a more comfortable position on his cabin bunk and filled his own glass and that of his visitor's from the bottle he held in his hand.

The visitor for whom second officer Janess was pouring such liberal portions of Venusian whisky, was a huge, hulking, bald-headed, flat-nosed oiler named Stover. Stover had sleepy eyes, but they were more than usually alert now as second officer Janess talked to him.

"The very fact that Wade was able to fix those portside and stern rockets and get this tub through Heaviside without trouble, is enough to show us that he'll need careful watching, Stover," second officer Janess was saying. Janess was a tall, gaunt, unsmiling fellow with a frogbelly complexion and lank, uncombed black hair.

"I'm on the ball," Stover assured him. "It'll be easy."

Second officer Janess downed his drink in a gulp.

"It had better be easy," he remarked, "and slick." He reached for the bottle to punctuate his remark by filling another hooker. "There's plenty of cash tied up in this deal, in case you might have forgotten. And there's a neat percentage in it for us if we carry off our

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part."

Oiler Stover's sleepy eyes glimmered greedily.

"This old hulk is insured to the hilt, eh?"

"Better than that," Janess answered. "She is overinsured. The owners faked a cargo value of three hundred thousand *zennas*. So this tub is worth all that—from the insurance company."

Stover shook his head and whistled admiringly through his ragged front teeth.

"Wow—three hundred thousand!" Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "But how did they get around the insurance inspection of the cargo?"

"Changed cargoes after inspection," Janess grinned. "And a slick job of it, too."

"But the insurance company must have seen the rotten condition of this old tub," Stover protested. "How'd they ever pass it?"

"Trick wording in the clauses. Barlowe and Keith aren't dummies. They had their lawyers draw up special papers—stating that any accident due to the condition of the ship is noncollectable. It's just insured against natural perils."

"But that was cutting their own throats," Stover frowned. "What else?"

"That," explained Janess patiently, "was the only way they could get the insurance. But that extra clause—a lot of whereas and whereof stuff—invalidates the first clause. So in reality, the insurance monkeys are liable for the loss of the ship and the cargo in a blanket valuation, *even if* the cargo's lost due to the instability and unspaceworthiness of the *Princess!*"

"Whew," Stover whistled through his jagged front teeth again, "what a sucker insurance company!"

Second officer Janess shook his head.

"No," he disagreed. "It's not a dumb insurance outfit, it's the smart shysters Keith and Barlowe got to write up their end of the clause."

Stover reached over to the bottle and poured himself a drink. He smiled then.

"Okay, have it your way. Here's to the smart shysters, and to Barlowe and Keith!"

Second officer Janess raised his glass.

"And to tomorrow night, when we go into our part of the bargain."

As they clinked their glasses together, there was a knock on the cabin door.

"Come in," Janess shouted.

THE door opened, and a tall, smiling redheaded young man stepped into the room. He was sparse framed, and very thin. His long sharp nose predominated the rest of his features.

"You're late, Quanes," Janess said.

Quartermaster Quanes closed the door behind him, still smiling.

"Of course I am," he answered. "I was busy down in the hold, getting those electro caps attached to the last of our precious cargo."

"Well," Janess grunted. "As long as you weren't trying to look up that stowaway Mackay girl, okay. Stay away from her. She's Peter Mackay's daughter, don't forget. And even though her old man doesn't know she's aboard the *Princess*, the girl is in plenty close with old Captain Toby and young Wade, by now."

"I didn't know about the last, Quanes said. "Fast worker, this Wade. I understood that they weren't too fond of each other when he first found her hiding in the space lifeship."

"If I didn't know you better," Janness said warningly, "I'd say you sounded jealous. Stay away from the women, Quanes," he concluded "at least

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on this job."

Quanes sat down beside Janess and poured himself a drink into the glass Stover had just drained.

"Don't worry. I was just thinking that she's a looker, and might make pleasant company for me when we leave this old tub to blow to hell and go to that asteroid hideout until things clear up."

"That's all we'd need," Stover said disgustedly. "What would we do after that, kill her?"

"She'll die with the rest of 'em, when we blow the works up tomorrow night," Quanes observed matter-of-factly. "What's the difference?"

"Forget those ideas!" second officer Janess snapped in sudden irritation. "We don't want any wenches cluttering this thing up. As it is, everything will be smooth. The *Princess* will blow from here to Saturn, and we'll be on our way to an asteroid hideout. Let it go at that, and stop thinking about who dies and why."

"Don't get nervous," Stover said to Janess.

"Who's nervous?"

"You are," Stover retorted. "Calm down. Everything's set."

"It better be," Janess muttered. "There's a lot riding on it, and if we mess it up, there'll be a mass murder charge against us."

Quanes broke in. He was still smiling. He fingered his long sharp nose. "Never mind the jitters. Do as Stover says. Calm down."

"See that you don't forget your instructions," second officer Janess flared irritably, "and leave the rest to me."

"I'm pat on mine," Quanes smiled. "I touch off the fuses on the electro caps a little after eight bells. We'll be safely off from the tub by then."

"And I smash the rocket gauges, plus a few tubes, promptly at eight bells," Stover put in.

"Don't forget the navigation apparatus, also," Janess snapped.

"No worry about that," Stover retorted. "Just do what you're supposed to do, and I'll do what I have to."

"I'll take over the bridge during that time, don't worry," Janess said. "Even if I have to kill the Old Man."

"See that you don't get yourself plugged," Quanes added. "You're the only bright boy who knows enough navigation to handle that streamlined space lifeship. We'd be in a hell of a mess if you botched your part."

"Let's stop this damned wrangling," Janess said suddenly, mouth taut. "We might as well drink to tomorrow night—at eight bells!"

Silently, the three raised their glasses . . .

V

FIRST ROCKETEER TOMMY WADE stood proudly by the portside tubes in the rocket room of the *S.S. Princess* the following evening. It was a little after seven bells. Sweat and oil and grime coated his handsome young features, but for the first time in months, there was a glint of pleased satisfaction in his eyes.

The tremendous task Wade had faced in turning the ancient rockets of this wretched hulk into workable machines had miraculously been accomplished. It had meant endless hours without sleep, constant, ceaseless toil—and the devil's own brand of ingenuity and genius. But he had done it, and at the rate his miraculous job of nursing was progressing, the *S.S. Princess* might yet stagger into Earth port on schedule.

All of which, considering that the *Princess* had once had little likelihood of ever reaching port at all, was nothing

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short of incredible. And now, as Wade tinkered with a treacherous valve handle, he even whistled a little. For there was another reason for his exuberance—an additional one.

Joy Mackay, the blond, green-eyed stowaway—in spite of the fact that her father was a partner in the firm that permitted this wreck of a space tramp to take to the lanes—knew a little something about motors and rockets. And it had been through this knowledge that the first mutual dislike between Wade and the girl had flared into a technical argument, and then cooled off into a newborn respect for one another.

Any girl, Wade felt, who knew as much about rockets as Joy did couldn't be wrong. And any young first rocketeer who could perform miracles in his trade before a young lady who could understand those miracles, deserved the wholehearted respect of that young lady. At least if that young lady happened to be Joy Mackay.

And in four days the mutual dislike had blossomed into something that was dangerously approaching the fringes of romance.

At the moment, Wade had forgotten that he was half an hour overdue for his date on deck with Joy Mackay. There had been a slight rocket count discrepancy which Wade began to check, and this had lured him further and further into his work until at last he stood as he did now, an electra stinson in his hand, and an utterly absorbed glare in his eyes.

Now Wade tinkered on. Time moved irrevocably forward. And a lovely green-eyed blonde grew more and more angry as she stamped up and down the deck of the *Princess*.

The rocket rooms, with the exception of Wade, were deserted. So intent was Tommy Wade, that he wasn't conscious of eight bells striking throughout the ship some minutes later. And neither was he conscious of the hulking figure that slid from behind a duralloy bulkhead, stepped up two feet in back of him, and brought a thick blunt object smashing down upon his skull.

And with the blow, Wade slid slowly to the floor, blood puddling around his head, now conscious of nothing whatever.

Oiler Stover looked down at Wade, kicked him once with a heavy space boot. Then he grunted in satisfaction, and stepped up to the rocket valve gauges. With the same thick, blunt object, Stover smashed in the valve gauges, knocked off a few piston arms protruding from the portside and stern tubes, and otherwise played hell with the life and guts of the *S.S. Princess*.

Standing back, breathing heavily, Oiler Stover surveyed his job smugly. The portside and stern rockets were already missing count. In another ten minutes they'd stop all together . . .

OLD CAPTAIN TOBY hadn't left his bridge at eight bells. So that necessitated the use of an atomic pistol—skillfully used, butt end, in the hands of second officer Janess—on the back of his round old skull. Captain Toby slumped deckward with a heavy sigh, just like a man going to sleep. Minutes later, Janess had successfully smashed all the navigating instruments of the *Princess* . . .

And also at eight bells, quartermaster Quanes inserted his keys into the lock of the cargo hold bulkheads, slipped inside the darkened quarters, and went to work setting the time mechanism on the fuses he'd inserted over the ends of many highly explosive sticks of *explotomic*. He carried a small round gadget in his hand. The small round gadget had a time device on it similar to the devices on the ends of the fuses

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he'd fixed to the *explotomic* sticks.

Quartermaster Quanes had to smile as he fixed all the time devices to correspond to the interval set on the gadget in his hand. It would be simple. Toby and Wade would be out for at least another hour; the remainder of the crew, stupid Venusian louts, he'd gotten thoroughly drunk—and when he pressed the button on the gadget in his hand, he and Janess and Stover would be a half-hour distance from the *S.S. Princess* which would promptly blow up with a bang.

And Quanes had one more reason to smile. Janess had taken the precaution to lock the girl, Joy Mackay, in her stateroom. But he, Quanes, had unlocked the door before the girl had realized what had been done. Now she would probably be up on deck waiting for Wade's nightly stroll. But she'd get more than she bargained for. Quane had every delightful intention in the world of carrying Joy Mackay off with them when they took to the space lifeship. What the hell, you could always get rid of her later. Two months hideout on that asteroid would be made much more pleasant by her company. . . .

PROMPTLY at ten minutes after eight bells had struck, second officer Janess, Oliver Stover, and quartermaster Quanes met at their appointed spot on the deck of the *S.S. Princess*. The appointed spot was beneath the davit-hung streamlined space lifeship.

"All set?" asked Janess. He was breathing hard.

Stover nodded.

"Just like I promised. I worked it smooth."

Quanes was looking sharply, impatiently, up and down the deck.

Janess lashed at him with a question. "Well, Quanes? What about it? Your part taken care of?"

Quanes seemed startled.

"Yeah, sure. It's all set, but—"

"But what?" Janess snapped out the words edgily.

"But Joy isn't on the deck here. She usually meets Wade here at this time."

Second officer Janess snarled angrily.

"Why you simpleton, I locked her in her stateroom. Don't you remember? She's okay, won't be able to break out in time. Come on. Let's get going!"

Quanes was slightly pale around the gills.

"I, uh," he faltered, "I, eh, er, let her out. I unlocked the door before she knew you'd locked her in. I figured she'd be up here, at this spot, waiting for Wade. Then I could have—"

"Could have taken her along?" Janess almost screamed the words in his sudden blazing fury. "Why you blithering ass, you moronic nincompoop— I told you, I warned you, I—" he broke off spluttering.

Stover looked at Quanes with angry, heavy-lidded eyes.

"You damned sap," he grated. He whipped an atomic pistol from his holster. "We should burn your bowels out right here and now!"

Quanes turned ashen, now.

"Look," he pleaded, "don't. She can't do any harm wandering around. They'll never discover the *explotomic* sticks in the cargo, even if she does bring the captain or Wade around!" He spluttered on. "Don't burn me, please, for God's sakes. I thought it was a good idea!"

Janess grabbed Stover's arm, pushed it down.

"We'll decide on that later," he said. "Let him alone for now." He turned to the rail davits from which the space lifecraft was hung. "Let's lower this, and in a hurry!"

The winches creaked, and slowly the

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beautiful streamlined craft was lowered to an even edge with the deck. Janess reached over and pulled back the seven foot hatch cowling along the top of the craft. It moved noiselessly.

"Pile in," Janess ordered. "Plenty of room in the rear. I'll take the controls. This little baby is a juiced-up power job, thank heavens!"

The three tumbled into the craft. Janess said over his shoulder to Stover,

"Get ready to cut those davits loose, the minute I choke up on these atomic motors!" He bent down to flash the vizaglow over the complicated instrument panel.

Moments passed.

"Hurry up!" Stover snapped.

"There isn't a lot of time," Quanes reminded.

Janess looked back over his shoulder. Sweat was trickling down his forehead. "I've been gunning the damned things for five minutes," he protested bewilderedly. "Something's haywire!"

Another three minutes passed. Stover was cursing softly in the back of the ship. Janess was soaked with sweat, and his tunic hung to him as if immersed in water. He looked back over his shoulder appealingly.

"Well?" Stover demanded.

"I'm no rocketeer," Janess protested. "I can't take 'em apart and put them together again!"

"Did you look this over this afternoon?" Stover snarled.

"Swear to Saturn!" Janess looked back again. His face was frightened, now. Desperately, he bent once more over the instrument panel. His hands worked frantically. More minutes flew by. At last he looked up and over his shoulder again. His voice was choked, almost on the verge of hysteria. "I can't do a thing. It's no use!"

Quanes was holding the time device gadget in his hand.

"I've set this thing," his voice trembled. "We're done for if we stick around here!"

"Get down there," Stover snarled suddenly, "and remove those caps on the fuses. It's the only way."

Stumblingly, shakily, frantically, Quanes climbed out of the space lifecraft and jumped from the rail to the deck. He straightened up—and looked into the muzzle of an atomic rifle!

FIRST rocketeer Tommy Wade, still a trifle unsteady, and with a head quite a little bit bloody, was snarling very unpleasantly behind the stock of that rifle!

"Get the hell up with your hands, Quanes!" he snarled.

Quanes got the hell up with his hands.

Joy Mackay, who was standing beside Tommy Wade, green eyes blazing like twin fires from hell, was also holding an atomic rifle. She looked contemptuously at Quanes.

"Saboteur!" she spat.

Quanes paled, then, suddenly, he yowled.

"Janess, Stover, watch yourselves!"

Joy Mackay clouted Quanes on the side of the head with her rifle butt. He whimpered once as he sprawled face forward and unconscious to the deck.

Second officer Janess stuck his head out of the hatch of the space lifeship, blinking quizzically. Wade was there to bring the blunt end of his atomic rifle crashing down on the fellow's unprotected skull.

Oiler Stover came up and out of the space lifeship shooting. But his aim was wild, and just a preliminary to give him a chance to emerge. Wade, as Stover figured he would, wasted precious seconds in forcing the unwilling Joy Mackay back into the shelter of a bulkhead. Then Wade turned to face

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Stover.

Stover fired as Wade wheeled. The shot tore into the fleshy part of Wade's thigh, but he forced a grin to keep the other from knowing he'd hit him. Then Wade fired, carefully and coolly, as two shots from Stover's atomic pistol burned the duralloy armor of the bulkhead behind his ear.

Stover staggered back. Wade's shot had caught him in the shoulder. Wade's second shot was better. Stover pitched over dead, an ugly blue burn—the size of a *kleka*—in the center of his forehead!

Joy Mackay stepped out from behind the bulkhead.

"Tommy," she sighed. "You'll have to teach me how to shoot that well."

Wade grinned. This was the type of wife to have. He suddenly decided to see what he could do about the having.

"I guess I did all right on the atomic motors in the life spaceship, eh darling?" Joy said proudly.

"Beyond repair?" Wade asked.

"Not for *you*," the girl answered.

Wade grinned again. "You're a clever little mechanic, Joy, and a very tough one."

Joy Mackay sighed.

"Oh, Lord. I always forget to be feminine at the proper moments. Why do I always forget to turn on my girlish wiles?" She smiled sweetly.

Wade looked at her.

"What do you think you're doing now?" he asked.

Quanes suddenly groaned at their feet. Wade looked down. The fellow had a small, glittering gadget in his hand. Wade bent over and picked it up. Suddenly he gasped, face ashen. Like a wild man, he turned and bolted away from Joy, over to the cargo hatches. In an instant, he pried one open and disappeared below the deck.

Below, Wade worked like a dervish. He flew from case to case, tearing cap after cap from the explotomic sticks in them. Finally, as he went over the hold for the fourth time without finding any more, he sighed deeply. The menace of an immediate explosion was gone. Wade leaned against the case and mopped his face. He wished he was as cool as Joy more than likely was at the moment. And thinking of Joy once more, Wade remembered what he had resolved to do in the matter of a wife. He started back to the deck . . .

BUT when Wade faced Joy again on deck, the grin was gone from his face, and an entirely different expression was there: Maybe it was the last strain, the shock of the potential explosion, that suddenly jarred the punch drunk goofy glow from his brain. For it could only have been a punch drunk glow that would have allowed him to forget two disastrous items of grim reality in the after flush of his coup against Stover, Janess, and Quanes.

Quickly, and without trimmings, Wade explained their predicament to Joy.

"We'd been chumps enough to forget that we're now stranded helplessly out here in space," he said. "The instruments, the rockets, everything to enable us to find our way back to Mars or ahead to Earth has been thoroughly smashed. Undoubtedly we've already drifted off our course, and we'll drift farther and farther, through the timeless reaches of the void. We might very well never be found again!"

"But, Tommy," the girl protested, "there's the telaflash system."

"That's been smashed too. They thought of everything."

"Nice work, youngster!"

Tommy Wade wheeled at the new voice. Wheeled, and faced Captain Toby, white-faced, head wrapped in a

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thick towel, and leaning against a bulkhead rail for support. Wade leaped to the old man's side.

"You all right, Captain?"

"Think I'll manage," Toby said a little thickly. "I'm still a little dizzy from that bang they maneuvered."

Wade helped him to a deck casing, where he sat down while Joy expertly unwrapped the towel from his battered head, and readjusted it for more comfort and cleanliness. Wade explained the situation from what he had seen of it.

"We could be in a rottener mess, lad," Captain Toby said when Wade had finished, "but to do so would be quite a trick." He shook his head dispondently. "I see it all too clearly, and much too late. The dirty devils as are our owners must have cooked this up. Just before I staggered down here, after coming to, I pawed through the ships' papers more thoroughly than a captain generally does. I paid especial note to the duplicate insurance papers, which I'd never bothered to give particular heed to till now."

"Well," Wade demanded. "What did you find?"

"This vessel is insured for three hundred thousand *zennas!*"

Wade gasped. Joy opened her mouth in disbelief.

"No," Wade protested, "that's impossible."

"It was a slick, dirty deal that I've no time to explain now," Captain Toby said. "But the facts are that the three murdering skunks who tried to ruin us —and have just about succeeded—are stooges of the owners, Keith, Barlowe, and Mackay, who wanted the *Princess* to blow up in space so they'd pick up a fortune from the insurance."

"I don't believe it!" It was Joy Mackay who stepped forward, cheeks crimson, green eyes blazing. "My father would never be a party to such a deal. The money doesn't mean a thing to him, he's got more than he could ever use. There'd be no reason for him to risk his reputation by such an underhanded scheme!"

WADE put his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Take it easy," he said. "We don't think your dad is involved in this, Joy. But it's a cinch one or both of his partners are."

Joy was still hotly indignant.

"I'll prove it," she stormed. "I'll get him right now on the telaflash and find out."

"Calm a bit, Joy," Captain Toby advised. "There's no telaflash left in commission. We believe you, lass!"

"But there *is* a telaflash," Joy insisted, "in the little space lifeship. I saw it when I was inside putting the atomic motors on the blink."

Tommy Wade let out a yell of wild joy.

"Then we're on our way!" he shouted. "If there's that telaflash, and I recall now there is, we're all set. About a hundred million super ideas have just occurred to me. All of them are wows, listen!" And he drew Joy aside, whispering fiercely in her ear.

"You have your dad arrange that, will you?" he asked her, "and if needs be, he can telaflash an answer."

Joy nodded excitedly, and turned to rush to the streamlined little space lifeship.

Captain Toby was thoroughly bewildered.

"What's this all about, lad? Have you lost your mind?"

"No, Captain," Wade shouted happily. "I've just found it again. I'm going to repair those atomic motors and get us back to Mars!"

"Can you do it?" Toby asked, hope

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dawning in his eyes.

"You bet. And that little ship has the power to do something else. Something else that's going to put us on easy street!"

"Wade, Wade," Joy came running back a few minutes later, "the telaflash worked. I got father. I was right. He knew nothing of it. He'd been bought out by Barlowe and Keith only a few days ago. He's going to do what you say. He'll have everything set when we get back to Mars!"

Wade grinned, pulling off his tunic jacket and rolling up his sleeves. "Now to get to work on a motor," he grunted.

THE shipping offices of the space cargo firm of Keith and Barlowe were crowded some four days later. Crowded by the presence of an old grizzled space captain, a young first rocketeer, a stocky, moustached gentleman named Peter Mackay, and said gentleman's daughter Joy.

Mackay was speaking, and his words lashed at Barlowe and Keith, both of whom sat in chairs behind the cheap, large desk in the center of the room.

"So you're stuck," Peter Mackay asserted. "You're caught with the goods, both of you. Young Wade *towed* the S.S. *Princess* into port by means of the small space lifeship. And that towing, you two crooks, means salvage. Salvage according to the strict laws of space rulings. Young Wade is entitled to a salvage fee from you of exactly the *insured value* of the S.S. *Princess* — three hundred thousand!"

"But—" Keith squeaked strickenly.

"It's sheer banditry!" Barlowe boomed. "Why, why—"

"It's the law," Peter Mackay cut in.

"But paying three hundred thousand would break us—" Keath bleated. "We've hardly that much including our business!"

"Turn over every last rightful cent," said Peter Mackay in the squarejawed manner that had made him millions, "including the business. Otherwise we'll throw you to the jaws of the law. Take your choice. I had my lawyers draw up young Wade's claims. I've the papers here. Sign them or else I'll call enforcement officers!"

Barlowe bit into his underlip. His voice shook as he spoke to his partner.

"All right. They've got us. We might as well, Kermit."

Wade, Captain Toby, Joy, and Peter Mackay grinned in simultaneously satisfied triumph. Barlowe and Keith took the papers and signed.

Wade turned to Joy.

"Think you can marry me in spite of your father's millions?" he asked.

Joy grinned like an elf.

"You are now the prosperous owner of a second rate line which—I am positive—you will some day build into a super-super service. That should satisfy my greed, plus the cash you're getting from Barlowe and Keith."

Wade, with one arm around Joy's slim waist, turned to captain Toby.

"And you've got a berth on my line, Captain, from now on in."

It was the old captain's turn to grin.

Peter Mackay spoke up.

"I've only just met you, Wade. But that doesn't make any difference to Joy. I can never change her mind once it's made up. And this time it is. However, for once I agree with her."

Wade reddened beneath his space bronze in becoming modesty. Then he turned to Keith and Barlowe who looked sickly on.

"Get out of my office, both of you," he ordered, "while I kiss my future wife!"

They got, quickly. But as for Captain Toby and Peter Mackay, they looked on shamelessly—admiringly . . .

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The Uninvited Jest

by ROG PHILLIPS

"LET'S see now," Ray Bradley said slowly. "This stuff gives me a headache, but I want to understand it if it IS understandable. The correct translation reads this way: two things cannot influence one another unless they both exist now. If two things do not have the same now they are mutually non-existent although they both exist. Time does not have real existence as an everywhere dense continuum but is an empirical continuum through which the now, which is of no temporal extent whatever, seems to be traveling uniformly. There may be other nows in the empirical continuum

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Is Time an endless stream? Or is it an endless series of cycles? The spore-spewing rocket above the primeval jungle—answered!

which have real existence, but if so, they are completely independent of the now of this reality."

He frowned in exasperation. "I don't get it. If this race hadn't had such a highly developed civilization, and if this book didn't have all the earmarks of a standard text of great importance, I would say that the author of it was screwy."

"It sounds to me like a build-up for a theory of time travel," Jack Dorsey said. "What else does it say?"

"This reality does not exist in time, but moves through time. If any other reality has real existence, it has it in a

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different now than our now, and its now would be independent of ours." Ray Bradley read from the typewritten translation. "Since it must be independent it follows that it could not possibly move through time at the same rate except by coincidence. Hence, inevitably, at some instant in the past or the future of our reality the nows of the two realities must coincide, but for no length of time whatever. At the intersection of the two nows there could be no detectable effect. This follows from the fact that there can be no motion whatever now, but only the appearance of motion by a comparison of details in two instants widely separated in the empirical time continuum."

"Mm, mm," Jack exclaimed. "This gets worse and worse. Go on."

"Either the rate of time travel of now is unalterable, or it is possible to speed it up or slow it down. If some section of our reality could be made to change its now, even by an inconceivably small margin, it would at once be non-existent to the rest of reality. However, if such a thing could happen, the section thus transported would almost instantly dissipate unless the now into which it jumped had a physical universe in space. In that case it would become a part of that reality unless its rate of travel in time were different." Ray Bradley looked up from the typewritten sheet and grinned at Jack. "This next is what we have been looking for. It says: From the nature of reality it is impossible to change its rate of uniform motion through time, and hence our now is unalterable. However, it is not inconceivable that part of our reality exists in two separate nows and may hence be affected by the rest of the realities of both nows, acting as intermediary for the interdependence of both realities, existing with both which are mutually non-existent!"

"I don't think I was cut out for this sort of work," complained Jack. "How could we be looking for that when we don't even know what it means? My personal opinion is that the experts have the translation wrong."

"No, the translation is perfectly correct. There's no question about that," Ray replied. "This civilization developed for thousands of years beyond our present level. How do you think Euclid would have felt turned loose in a modern science library?"

"I guess you're right," Jack shook his head dolefully and sighed in discouragement. "We'll just have to wade through it."

After a short pause Ray continued reading. "If such interrelation of nows has real existence it may be possible to use this as a springboard to jump our now ahead for some section of space, and jump it back again at will. If so, we will not be traveling into our own future or past, since they don't have real existence, but into distinct and independent universes, existing in a common space, traveling in a common time continuum, but existing in different nows."

"Zshat callsh fer a drink," Jack muttered, rising and staggering weakly toward the door.

RAY laughed, dropped the typewritten sheets on the office desk and followed him, catching up and pretending to help his companion to the door.

They stepped into the corridor and followed its right-angled turns until they reached the mess compartment. There they joined a group of a dozen or so men and women who had had the same idea, only sooner.

The shields and filter screens were swung back from the outer walls of the compartment, exposing to view the sweeping, monotonous landscape of

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Mars. A few degrees above the horizon the sun, considerably smaller than on Earth, hung in a deeply blue sky.

The ground outside the ship was a perfectly flat expanse of incredibly fine sand, of which the whole surface of Mars seemed to be composed. Starting about ten miles away to the left of the view was one of the low sand walls which stretched across the landscape to drop over the horizon to the right in a great circle line.

These giant sand walls, as much as a mile wide, and no more than thirty feet high crept over the surface at infinitely slow speeds, moved along by the ever constant winds which picked up a little sand on the windward front and dropped it again to the leeward. A cupful a day for every foot of length; and in a hundred years the sand wall has moved a foot across the planet.

When the first space ship had landed on Mars in 1956 and then brought back the news that the supposed canals were only slightly-raised sand dunes, made regular by the perfect constancy of the tide winds, the news had shattered all hopes of there being any traces of civilization on the planet.

Then, one fall day in 1961 the world had been electrified by the announcement that traces of a city had been found on Mars. Julian Varny, the discoverer, had brought back a stainless steel vase of queer design, and several photographs of structural regularities protruding slightly above the smooth floor of the planet.

Other explorers, seeing a chance for immortality in the history of space travel, had combed the surface while a giant laboratory ship was being constructed to carry trained personnel and fabulous amounts of equipment to the site of the ancient city of who knows what kind of creatures that lived in the dim past of the planet.

No other traces had been found, however, and now, two years after it had been discovered, the ancient civilization was being dissected carefully. The entire resources of the Earth were behind this project; and why not? In all the universe there seemed to be no intelligent creature except man. But here was unmistakable evidence that long ago there HAD been thinking creatures.

In six months of earth time the three thousand experts had uncovered thousands of relics. Then they had discovered the time capsule. A stainless steel sphere fifty feet in diameter, it was mirror smooth, with no signs of an opening anywhere. Finally they had commenced drilling into it and chipping out an opening. It took almost a week to get through the two-foot thick wall of solid stainless steel.

Inside was stored the record of the science, history and knowledge of this mysterious, extinct race of creatures. An estimated two hundred thousand books whose pages were of stainless steel with the characters lightly engraved on the surface. A light coating of black ink paste, rubbed over the surface and then wiped off, brought out the characters so that they could be photostated. As soon as a book was photostated it was cleaned and returned to its proper place in the collection. The photostats alone were handled to any great extent.

DECIPHERING of the strange writing had been easy and made correct beyond dispute because of the series of introductory volumes the ancient race had left which gave unmistakable pictorial meanings to the various words. It had immediately become obvious that the stainless steel globe was in reality a time capsule, just as had been suspected, designed to pre-

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serve all the knowledge of this race for millions and billions of years until someone came along with the ability to carve an opening into the two-foot thick stainless steel wall.

But what knowledge! Most of it seemed beyond understanding. There was a discussion on it going on in the mess compartment. Lahoma Powell, the brilliant and noted psychologist, was talking.

"The book I'm translating is beyond me," she was saying. "It starts out by saying that all life must be essentially complexes based on individual molecules of cyclic structure with either physical breaking points or zero potential terminals. Then it goes into detailed structure and chemical reaction. I'm not going to translate the book. I'm just going to translate the written part and give the key to the translation of the chemical details that form the biggest part of the book."

"Hah!" exclaimed Ray Bradley who had just entered with his partner, Jack Dorsey. "That stuff is elementary compared to what we have been translating. Did you know that there is no such thing as time?"

Pleased at the looks of incredulity this remark invoked, he went on. "Well, believe it or not, there is no such thing as time. If there were, the past and the future would exist just as solid as the present. Only these creatures called it the 'now' instead of the present. They seemed to make some sort of a distinction between the present and the now, too. They say that the present lags behind the now and is as fictitious as time. The now seems to be moving IN time without forming any part OF time."

He frowned in puzzlement. "You know, there seems to be a meaning there I can almost get. The universe of reality exists NOW, and will always exist NOW. It didn't exist yesterday. No. That isn't right. What I mean is that it DOESN'T exist yesterday. No. That isn't what I mean either."

Everyone laughed. Ray's frown erased itself as he smiled at his own bewilderment. "Anyway," he concluded, "I think they've got something there. They seem to make a distinction between two kinds of existence. The universe in the now has real existence. But time, which the now moves through without forming any part of, has what they call empirical existence. They call time an empirical continuum and space a real continuum. They say that two material universes can exist in the same space so long as their nows are separate. Then they say that some part of our own universe might conceivably exist in more than one now. That is really beyond me!"

"I think I know what they meant," Lahoma said, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"What?" encouraged Ray.

"It's really quite simple. If another real universe exists in our space in a different now," Lahoma spread her hands in a gesture that implied "Quite simple, by dear Watson," "it doesn't exist now, and in all our past and in all our future that will hold true. We can always say that it doesn't exist now. And if there are people in that other universe with a different now, they can always say the same, because we DON'T exist in their now."

"I can disprove that," Jerry Myers, the famous geologist, spoke up. "Suppose their now is twenty-four hours behind ours. Then their now is where ours was yesterday. That right?" At Ray's nod he went on. "Then that universe would be ours as it was yesterday, and they would be us."

"That isn't right," Ray objected. "They explicitly state that our uni-

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verse as it was yesterday does not have real existence and that our universe only exists now."

"YOU mean time travel is impossible?" Jerry asked. Then without waiting for an answer, "Well, it is generally considered to be impossible anyway. If we could travel into the past we could murder our own grandparents before they got married and had any children." He chuckled.

"That's the funny part of it," Ray said. "These creatures say that time travel might be possible, but that if it is you don't land in your own universe at some other time in the past or future, but in a different universe altogether, which exists in our space, but in a different now."

"A sort of fourth dimension?"

"No, that's the funny part of it," Ray answered. "They are quite explicit about there being no fourth dimension. They say that if we could change our now we would still be in the same space of three dimensions. If that now had a universe we would be sitting pretty; but if it had no universe in the now we landed in we would disperse."

"It sounds like they were trying to get around having a fourth dimension to me," spoke up Sigmund Atlee, the chief engineer in charge of excavation. "What I mean is, if we take the now of our universe as a three dimensional 'plane' in four dimensional space, we satisfy all the details of their theory in a more natural way. Then we can admit all they say, and our universe is simply moving uniformly in the fourth dimension. We can then admit that it exists only in the now, and that other universes can exist in other nows, because the now of existence is merely its fourth dimensional space co-ordinate."

Ray grinned cheerfully. "I can't argue with you. We are here, not to prove these creatures were wrong and we are right, but just to find out what they knew and believed. So far as we have gone it seems they did not believe in a fourth dimension of any kind."

Sigmund smiled back. *"Touche,"* he said.

The intercom came to life at that moment and said, "All technicians and department heads are called for an immediate general assembly. An important discovery has been made. All technicians and department heads. General assembly now."

The mess compartment emptied with a murmur of excitedly curious voices drifting back.

Lawrence Manning, the architecture historian, stood on the slightly raised platform of the assembly hall. As soon as the three hundred odd experts had all seated themselves he began talking.

"We came across the plans to the city, finally," he said. "It seems that this city is in a valley about twelve hundred feet deep. Of course the sand has filled it in, and if some of the buildings had not been about fourteen hundred feet high we would never have discovered it. The exact location of the time sphere is shown, and from that and the many things we have already determined about this area, we can tell pretty much what is underneath us, and where.

"There is something that seems to be of even greater importance than the time sphere itself. A sort of vault. It's two miles directly south of the time sphere and eight hundred feet lower. It was originally built into the bedrock of the hillside in that area.

"This vault has walls twenty feet thick. It seems to have been designed so that nothing could break into it.

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But," and he chuckled, "it has vault doors on it. Two of them, each ten feet thick. Each door has a combination lock on it. The locks are under the surface of each door, and the combination to each is in a code. We are warned that we cannot grope for the locks, but must locate them before we touch the surface of each door, or the lock mechanism won't function. And we must solve the code combinations the first time, because if we make a mistake the combination changes. We are told that if this happens we can only determine three possible answers to the second combination, and have to guess which is right. The second mistake nets us one chance out of nine on the third try. And if we fail then we can start all over again in a thousand Martian years when the combination returns to the original settings.

"Obviously this was done so that no inferior mind could get in. That implies that what is inside is of more importance even than what is in the time sphere. I can't imagine what it would be, myself, unless it is some of the Martians themselves in suspended animation! They don't leave any hints, though, so your guess is as good as mine. A thorough study of the detailed maps of the city shows no other sites of special importance than these two; the sphere, and the vault."

SIGMUND ATLEE stood on the small platform of the heavy derrick from which was suspended the driller, a huge affair that sank slowly into the ground and formed a four foot tube straight down. The three inch thick cable that would eventually pull it back to the surface swayed slightly as it hung a couple of feet in front of him.

Every fifteen minutes the machine far below would jerk and growl with a deep throated roar as it bored through another floor level. In the hundreds of centuries since the building had been left to the whims of nature the almost atomic sand particles had completely filled every cubic inch of space all the way down.

The driller, by the tremendous power of its weight and ultra-high frequency vibrations, forced this sand to the sides and as it sank lower and lower left a smooth, circular wall of fine, but very strong cement, three inches thick, made of the sand itself and a plastic solvent material that hardened into a ceramic material as strong as steel.

The driller reached the level of the vault and was pulled up, swung to one side, and a platform with several workmen dropped down the bore.

Twenty-two hours after work had begun, the four foot shaft was completed and the big door of the vault made accessible! Now would come the ticklish work.

Ray Bradley and Jack Dorsey stood on the sandy floor in front of the vault. The door was a mirror-smooth expanse of stainless steel, four feet wide and eight feet high, without a trace of a knob.

"Got any ideas?" asked Ray.

"Lots of them," Jack answered, "but none of them would work. We can't use an electrical probe. X-ray wouldn't do any good, since we can't get on the other side until after we find the knob. I doubt if any kind of a sound probe, measuring echoes in the metal, would work."

The platform came to rest behind them and Lahoma and Mr. Atlee stepped off.

"Haven't you got it open yet?" Lahoma exclaimed in mock surprise.

Ray sneered at her and said, "Don't be funny. This is serious."

Lahoma gave him as much of a leer

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as her habitually pleasant face could muster and replied, "It *will* be serious if you don't get it open—for you."

"Don't I know it!" murmured Ray, turning back to the blank expanse. His face lit up with a sudden light. "I've GOT it," he said, snapping his fingers.

Without waiting for comment he went on. "If the knob is near the surface it is covered with a sheet that can't be over a few inches thick. If we heat the surface it will cause the knob cover to bulge just enough to be detectable!"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mr. Atlee. "The cover is probably welded in. Why not polish the surface even smoother and let acid etch out the weld metal?"

"That has been tried on samples of structural joints of this metal," Jack answered him. "This metal is thousands of years old and the crystalline structure has become perfectly uniform so that weld metal is undetectable. I think Ray's found the only method."

The lift went up with a note to send down a torch. While it was gone Ray started the conversation that had been broken off by the assembly call.

"I was going to bring up a point about the assumption that our now is uniform all over the universe," he said. "Suppose it isn't? Suppose, for example, that the now of Arcturis is fifty years behind ours here. Then we would be seeing the light that leaves Arcturis now. Get what I mean?" he asked hopefully.

Lahoma laughed. "The way you said that last I think you hope we can explain to you what you mean."

"I know what I mean," Ray answered her in an injured tone. "I meant that if we could accelerate to the velocity of light and travel to some star, our clock would stand still until we decelerated again, so that even if it took a thousand years of time here on Mars or Earth, it would take no time at all to make the trip, so far as we were concerned."

"YOU'RE all wet, Ray," Jack broke in. "You're trying to say that now is a variable. Or anyway curved, with a functional link to the velocity of light. If that were so, you could send a beam of light in any direction and have it reflect back to its source, and be in a different now, so that at its source it wouldn't exist now. But it does exist now, somewhere between the source and the reflector. It never gets out of our now."

"I guess you're right," Ray admitted, "but the old boys here had something in their now business that I am going to get if it's the last thing I do. Maybe they jumped into another now and that is why they left the sphere and the vault. Certainly a race as advanced as this one was wouldn't have let a little thing like lack of water end their career. This vault was definitely made expressly for discovery in the distant future by an intelligent race, when they knew they wouldn't be around."

"Well, listen to this idea," Lahoma put in. "No matter how much you change the velocity of something in space, you can't change the velocity of its now through time. Everything in our now is moving at a uniform velocity through time. It would take a collision of two things traveling at different rate in time—in other words, with different nows that intersected when their space coordinates also intersected, to change the velocity of any part of our universe so that it would not be in our universe now, from now on."

"You made a grave mistake there," Sigmund Atlee said, with a twinkle in his eye. "Not in your logic, but in your psychology. And you a special-

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ist in psychology."

"I get what you mean," Lahoma said, an answering gleam in her own eye.

The lift came to a stop. There was a two wheeled cart on it with gas tanks, and a workman. He wheeled the cart over to the four, and listened while he was told what was wanted of him.

Three hours later Ray Bradley, Jack Dorsey, and the perspiring burner had to admit defeat. Not a bulge had developed. Lahoma and Sigmund had long since gone back to the surface. Now they, too, climbed onto the lift in discouragement, and were lifted up. On the way up Jack said to Ray and the workman, "You know, I had a vague suspicion that it wouldn't be so easy. They would have made it so it takes something really brainy to find that knob. And if I know my stainless steel, especially this one we are dealing with now, the surface of that door will be as hard as diamond by morning."

THREE weeks passed with no success. The newspapers back on earth carried a complete description of the problem, and the daily attempts that always failed.

One day a Chicago paper received a letter from a high school student offering a suggestion. "Why don't they," the letter suggested, "apply heat at one spot and measure its dispersal over the surface? The temperature pattern won't be uniform in the area over the knob."

When Ray and Jack received the suggestion Ray slapped his forehead in mock despair. "Now even high school kids are smarter than I am!" The suggestion worked, and after two hours of careful work the knob was located.

A small hole was drilled to the empty space where the dial chamber was, and a pea-size cold light capsule shoved in, followed by a slim periscope. This revealed the dimensions of the chamber and the appearance of the knob. With this data it was merely routine to cut away the covering.

A picture of the combination dial was taken for study, but of what use the picture would be no one would suggest, for the dial was perfectly blank.

"What do we have to go on?" asked Ray of the men who had been assigned to study of the problem.

"Thirteen seventh power equations in one variable and the statement that if we get it wrong the first time we have one chance in three of opening it the second try, and if we fail then we have one chance in nine of opening it the third try. If we fail then we have no more chances in our lifetime."

"What conclusions have you drawn?" Ray asked.

"Well," the man answered, "the first try, plus three possibilities on the second try, plus nine on the third, gives thirteen combinations. There are thirteen seventh power equations. Each of these has seven solutions. The seven roots to the first equation are probably the numbers of the combination."

"Only there are no gradations on the dial," Ray finished for him.

"That's right," the man agreed.

"Well," Ray went on, "obviously the seven roots give the settings for the combination. Not the order of the settings. And we don't know whether the numbers refer to radians or some special system of gradation analogous to our degrees. Wait a minute. How do you know they are power equations?"

"We had to deduce that. They wrote their exponents as subscripts."

"Hmm," Ray said. "Suppose they really are subscripts. Then we have thirteen simultaneous equations in seven unknowns. Then any seven of them would give seven knowns. But we

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would have a lot more than thirteen sets of equations. Maybe you're right, but we must make sure."

Two weeks of careful study of the mathematics books left by the ancient race disclosed that they had three systems of dividing the circle. But each system of measurement used a different symbol, and the symbol used in the power equations was the same as the one which meant one twenty-fourth of a circle.

Meanwhile a device had been built which could be screwed onto the face of the vault door and attached to the knob, which could turn it any measured number of degrees in either direction.

It was a very nervous group that watched Jack Dorsey turn the combination dial according to the system they had finally settled on. When the last setting was reached the door slowly moved outward about a foot, revealing recessed hooks around the sides.

It took a whole day to excavate room enough to pull the ten foot thick block of solid metal out of the way.

The inner door of the vault was covered with the fine engraving the ancients had used to insure the preservation of their writing This was rapidly photographed and printed.

"What do you make of it?" Ray asked Lahoma some time later.

"I don't know," Lahoma replied. "Somehow, the vault seems to be the only illogical thing about the whole ruins. Why should they build such a huge vault, and install an atom-powered refrigeration system, just to preserve a few statues of stone? The temperature in there was far below freezing even yet, after—how long do they think it has been, Ray?"

"Seventy-five thousand years," he replied. "I wonder about that. Nothing could possibly have gotten out of there. Not even an atom. And the vault doors were not designed to be opened from the inside, either. Jack has been working on a theory that they thought it might be millions of years before the vault was opened, and the statues would crumble from age before then unless kept cold. That won't hold water, I am thinking"

He was silent for several minutes, frowning in thought "You know," he said suddenly, "if we put our conventional ideas into the problem, only one conclusion can be drawn. They kept it cold in the vault to preserve life. But what kind of life? We didn't find anything in there."

"Microbes," whispered Lahoma.

"Why microbes?" asked Jack. "They weren't microbes themselves. According to their statues they were men; human beings something like us, only shorter, and with brains about twice as heavy as ours."

"I don't know," Lahoma answered slowly. "But microbes are the only answer. Perhaps we'll never find out for sure. I doubt if a microbe could be revived after being frozen seventy-five thousand years. So maybe all there was were the statues and dust."

Part II (73,000 B.C. on Mars)

531 regarded 322 with expressionless face. His telepathic voice was cheery, though, as he regarded her mind. Spoken words would have been useless, even if his atrophied mouth had suddenly acquired the power to form words, because both were deaf,—hereditarily so.

Two hundred thousand years of nothing but telepathic exchange had atrophied the powers of speech and hearing until the power to utter sounds or hear them was gone. (The ability to consciously control the mouth was rare, and as amusing as the ability some peo-

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ple of today have to wiggle their ears.)

"What is the state of your phase of the problem?" 531 asked.

"We have tried over two thousand variations of environment, so far, without success. Division still does not come properly. Perhaps it is impossible." 322's thoughts were gloomy.

"Without division there is an appreciable margin for failure," 531 mused. "Still, if that must be, we must make the most of it. Keep trying, though."

"What is the general state of the problem now," asked 322.

"Much the same. Our theoretical solution to the problem of reaching another now has not met with the least success in experiment. If we could just reach a fraction of an instant into the past or future, our gravitational field would not exist for us, and we would be in all probability in an interstellar space, as you know. Then leaving this planet would mean simply transfer to another now, a slight period of waiting until our natural velocity had carried us out into space, then reversion to our ordinary now. We could then go any place we wished to. It's too bad we have been unable to find any more fissionable lead. There are not enough sources of power left on the planet to get anything more than the weight of one person off. It seems that unless time travel is possible we are doomed to extinction. All we need is atomic power to save the race. Power to go out into space and find enough ice blocks to renew our dwindling water supply."

"Then my experimental department is the only hope?" 322 asked.

"It would seem so. The life forms on Earth are sufficiently well developed to make our alternative plan feasible. The idea of a vault here in the city would add to the odds in favor of the race not dying out. We could send a small rocket to the earth and leave the rest in the vault."

"What has been tried on time travel?" asked 322.

"Nothing much could be tried," 531 answered. "We have observed physical phenomena in environments of both positive and negative twenty-million electrostatic volt potentials and found nothing that was not predicted from accountable facts. It would be only on unpredicted data that we could formulate a method of altering the rate of our now."

"Then we will have to send the rocket to earth and watch the results," 322 remarked.

"Yes," 531 said. "We have perhaps three hundred years left in which to observe the results. We can't be sure in that time. So, regardless, we will leave the vault and the sphere. But it would be satisfying to know that we have descendants on earth."

Three Martian years later a long, slim rocket whished into the void and sped Earthward. Automatic mechanism set off rocket blasts that gave it a steady orbit in the earth's upper stratosphere. It circled the planet several times, and then screamed downward to bury itself in the mud of a tropical marsh.

THE Martians, watching through their telescopes, seemed more concerned about the success of the rocket's flight around the Earth than about the success of its landing. Their giant telescopes, held squarely on the desired image by light-sensitive cells that kept the broad outlines of the image steady and the eyepiece, in spite of the rapid shifts caused by variation in refraction of the various layers of gas in their own planet and on Earth, told them of the rocket's end.

The Martians watched the rocket

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disappear in the black ooze, and saw the few bubbles that pushed to the surface; then ceased to be interested.

"If we postulate that the fundamental units of reality are in four dimensional space," Jack Dorsey argued, "then we can say that their now is their velocity in the fourth dimension, while they are only three dimensional in shape."

"Nonsense," Lahoma exclaimed. "You have to have the fourth dimension be distinct from the other three that way. And you have to have space, with no structure at all, be ruled by cartesian co-ordinates, like analytic geometry. That's too artificial."

She suddenly became pale and swayed dizzily. Brushing her forehead with the back of her hand she sat down on the sand.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack and Ray at the same time.

"I don't know," answered Lahoma.

"I'll go get the doctor," Jack mumbled, and ran toward the space ship.

Dr. Downing and two men with a stretcher came back with him. The doctor closely examined Lahoma. His only comment was, "Hmm." Then he gave a piercing, almost accusing look and ordered her placed on the stretcher.

That was the beginning. Before the day was over fifty women were in the ship's hospital. Rumor grew fast and furious. A disease had been in the vault. A disease that affected only women. The doctor and his staff refused to comment.

All leaves to Earth were cancelled until further notice, and a quarantine was placed on the whole area. Supply ships dropped their loads without landing. Communications with Earth were censored.

But after two months no deaths had resulted. The doctors were still uncommunicative, but they seemed sure of themselves, and quite optimistic.

"Have you found a cure yet?" Ray asked Dr. Downing one day.

Dr. Downing gave him an amused smile and said vaguely, "We really aren't looking for a cure. We are more interested in observing the development of the,—er, ah,—disease."

"Well," Ray persisted, "could we visit the girls. I'm sure Lahoma would like to have Jack and me visit her."

"I'm sure she would," the doctor chuckled, "but we can't allow that for some time yet."

Shortly after this a supply ship landed under robot control, carrying several cows, horses, goats, and even two female gorillas. These were, "To see whether the disease were communicative to animals as well as humans," to quote Dr. Downing's official statement.

Meanwhile the work of translating the thousands of volumes in the sphere progressed steadily. There was a complete volume on the theory of transtemporal existence.

Ray and Jack spent two months on this one volume, only to discover in the concluding chapter that the author had merely been eliminating possibilities in the whole book. He had built up a beautiful and consistent theory only to prove that it didn't hold water. And yet it was acclaimed inside the cover as one of the greatest theoretical advances in the history of the race. Their last achievement.

"Logically," it wound up, "if we give a particle existence in two separate nows which are travelling through time with any finite separation in time, and give it any uniform velocity in space, then we see that in the other universe it is existing in a different place in that now than it is in our now. If we postulate an everywhere dense continuum of nows, so that the particle becomes,

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in effect, a long string, any cross section of which is a sphere in a single now, we not only give time a real existence as an everywhere dense continuum, but also all the past and the future.

"If we do this we must account for the slicing of our now into a perfect three dimensional slice of four dimensional existence; the difference between one dimension and the other three, which are purely relative, thus introducing an absolute dimension into space; and finally we must postulate that motion is impossible of real substance, and only possible to space itself, moving uniformly along an absolute dimension. With all these artificialities we gain nothing concrete. Everything we obtain is repugnant to common sense and beyond proof.

"So by reduction to absurdity we have proved that no part of our universe can exist except now. There may be other nows, but they can have no functional connection with ours. And fundamentally, now is a property of the primal stuff of reality. Just as motion can only be known and not reduced to something simpler, so now is the metaphysically untouchable simplest abstraction from the concept of motion. Like space itself, it is everywhere the same. The now on Mars is exactly the same as the now billions of light years away. The measure of time and the perception of passage of time may vary, but the velocity of now in the empirical time continuum is unalterable."

— CONCLUSION

531 finished the report on the impossibility of time travel. He sighed regretfully. He had wanted to visit the Earth and perhaps see Martian civilization transferred to that planet in his lifetime. Now there was only extinction for him and his companions.

There might not be extinction for his race, however. He looked over the latest photos of Earth. It had been fifty Martian years since the rocket had sprayed its cargo around the Earth and then sunk into the ooze. Already there were several hundred villages dotting the surface of that planet. And the vault had been completed and sealed up. All was finished.

322, who had been quietly listening to her companion's thinking, telepathed, "Perhaps it is just as well that we could not bring about division without loss of identity. We have seen our children on Earth born out of the wombs of cattle, carnivorous beasts, and the strange Earth monkeys that look so much like caricatures of us. It is just as well that normal reproduction now take over or the human race would be the scourge of the Earth."

"Yes," 531 replied. "We took our fertilized eggs, and made them into spores able to survive various environments until they entered the bloodstream of warm-blooded animals. Then they reverted when touched by substances found only in the wombs of the females and started their growth. We sent billions of these to Earth. We have stored billions in the vault, where, if our first venture fails, some interstellar traveller may find them some day and unknowingly and unwittingly revive our race. We have put such difficulties in the way of opening the vault that only a race wise enough to immediately deduce what is going on will open it.

"If these spores could reproduce as spores, they would continually bring into being each generation on Earth. Normal reproduction would have no place in the scheme then, and human values would not exist. It's better that they don't multiply. True, the risk of extinction is greater this way, but a wiser Providence than we has decreed

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that this risk exist. If our children on Earth survive and follow their normal communal instincts,—who knows? In fifty or a hundred thousand years they may attain to the heights of civilization which we gained before our planet died. And living on a younger world they may go even further."

"I wonder," 322 said dreamily, "if it will be descendants of these children of ours on the Earth who will eventually open the vault?"

"It would be a good joke on them if they did," 531 chuckled. 322 joined in, and their telepathic chuckles spread over the city as others heard and laughed at the thought.

THE END

★ THE INVENTOR OF THE CROOKES TUBE ★

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

SIR WILLIAM CROOKES, English chemist and physicist, was born in London on June 17, 1832. He studied chemistry in that city at the Royal College of Chemistry and became an assistant under A. W. von Hofman. In 1854 he became assistant in the meteorological department of the Radcliff observatory, Oxford, and in the following year, the professor of chemistry at the Chester Training College. From the time of his marriage in 1856 to Ellen Humphrey he lived in London, devoting himself uninterruptedly to scientific work of various kinds. In 1859 he founded the *Chemical News,* and continued to be its editor during the remainder of his life. He was knighted in 1897 and received the Order of Merit in 1910. He was president at different times of many learned societies; from 1913-15 he was president of the Royal Society. He died in London on April 4, 1919.

Crookes was a brilliant investigator in many departments of theoretical and applied chemistry, and the discoverer of several important principles. He was an authority on sanitation and the disposal of sewage. He devised the method of attaining a high vacuum, which made the incandescent light bulb a possibility.

In 1861 spectroscopic observations on the residue from the manufacture of sulphuric acid led Crookes to the discovery and isolation of thallium, a specimen of which was shown in public for the first time at the exhibition of 1862. This metal when pure is of a silvery white color, and so soft that it can be scratched with a piece of pure lead. It can be extruded, but not drawn into the form of a wire, but has little tenacity or elasticity. It is slightly heavier than lead, melts at a lower temperature and tarnishes quickly in the air. Its compounds are extremely poisonous. In the Periodic System of the elements it is next to the bottom of the vertical group headed by boron, and which contains in the order given aluminum, scandium, gallium, yttrium, indium, lanthanum and erbium, and stands between mercury and lead in the eleventh of the horizontal series. During recent years, as a result of the discovery of radium and the series of disintegration products from it and the metal thorium, it has been thought by investigators of those phenomena that it may prove to be the final disintegration step of throium, as lead has proved to be of radium. When the flame produced by the combustion of thallium is examined in the spectroscope, a brilliant green line appears at one place, which is so characteristic that the presence of the metal in very minute quantities can be detected by the test. It occurs in nature in very few minerals, and almost always in combination with the non-metal selenium. In the course of investigations on the properties of thallium Crookes observed the curious behavior of the hot element while being weighed in vacuo. This led him to construct the radiometer.

HIS researches on the electrical discharge through a rarefied gas led to the observation of the dark space which bears his name, and Crookes developed his theory of "radiant matter" or matter in a "fourth state."

In 1883 Crookes began an enquiry into the nature and constitution of the Rare Earths, his observations on yttrium led him to the theory that all elements have been produced by evolution from one primordial stuff. He succeeded in artificially making minute diamonds; and on the discovery of radium he took up the study of its properties. He invented the spinthariscope which shows the presence of traces of radium salt by the production of phosphorescence on a zinc sulphide screen. Crookes was constantly consulted by the Government on chemical questions, and one of his many practical contributions to the public welfare was his production of a glass which would effectively shield the eyes of the workers from the deleterious rays emitted from molten glass.

Crookes wrote or edited various books on chemistry and chemical technology, including *Select Methods of Chemical Analysis,* which went through a number of editions. He was a keen student of psychic phenomena and sought to effect some correlation between them and ordinary physical laws. He received many honors during his lifetime, among them being the Nobel prize of 1917 for chemistry, and the Order of Merit in 1910.

THE END

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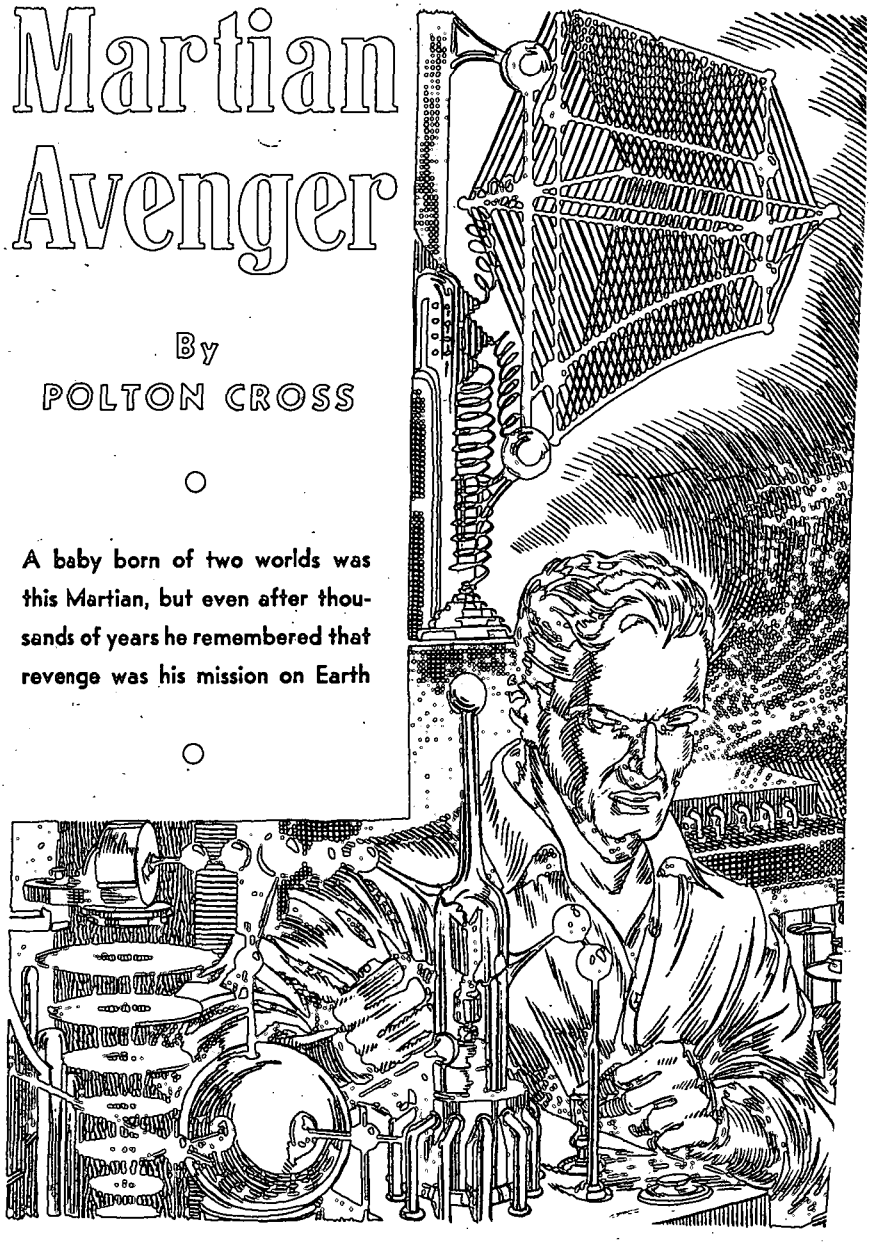
Martian Avenger

By
POLTON CROSS

○

A baby born of two worlds was this Martian, but even after thousands of years he remembered that revenge was his mission on Earth

○



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CHAPTER I

The Cell Cluster from Mars

"MR. HALWORTHY is in the laboratory, Miss Crawford. Working late, I guess."

Vera Crawford nodded her thanks as the old Institute janitor resumed his mop and pail. She strode on purposefully down the white enameled corridor, finally flung open the green door at the far end.

"Who the hell's opened that door?" demanded Halworthy's irate voice. "I don't want any cold air in here, and—Why hello, Vera!"

The scientist broke off in surprised greeting as he came round a bench piled up with bottles and paraphernalia. Young, good looking after a fashion, his blue eyes became rather sheepish as he found the girl accusingly regarding him.

"Are you aware, Lance Halworthy, that you had an appointment with me tonight for the television theater?" she asked bitterly. "It may interest you to know I've got feet as cold as icebergs from waiting down town for you!"

"I forgot all about it," he said solemnly. "Yes—seriously I did. I'm engaged on such an important experiment—"

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"Experiment! When do I ever hear any other excuse?" The girl came forward and rubbed her chilled hands over the electric stove. Then as Lance said nothing further she turned a curious pair of brown eyes upon him. "Well, what is it?" she asked resignedly. "Might as well give me *some* reason for your neglect. And it had better be a good one else I'll think twice about marrying you when the time comes!"

The threat was wasted on Lance. He merely smiled, took her arm, and led the way to a square case of glass bound around on three of its sides with strangely fashioned machines. There were tubes that contained a rose colored fluid, thermostatic heating devices, thermometers, and then a wired apparatus containing a spotless, wafer-thin piece of metal which beat to and fro with metronomic rhythm. Somehow, it resembled a heart.

Vera only glanced at these details: they were merely laboratory technique, Most of her attention was concentrated on an object repulsively like a large blood red worm, its substance shot through with veins of darker hue. It lay inside the case curled up in a semicircle, palpitating steadily.

Vera looked up sharply, vaguely horrified. "What are you trying to do? Cultivate a new species of snake?"

"Nothing like that," Lance laughed. "That thing came from Mars, and it's been entrusted to me by the Space Navigation Company. So you see I'm on an important job."

"But I thought explorers had proven Mars dead long ago?"

"That's so, but Valmerlik, who takes a delight in probing into places where ordinary space explorers have more sense than look, came across six preserved cell clusters buried near one of the Martian cases—hidden in an underground chamber which had unquestionably been made by intelligent means. Five of the cell clusters aggregates were useless: the Martian air, though mighty thin, had somehow gotten through to them and rotted them. The sixth cluster was in perfect condition, and here it is. We were stuck to know what to do, so we finally took the only course and fertilized it artificially on earth here. This is the result: life has begun. The cells have formed and produced fusion. Thanks to all this artificial incubation those cells are growing into a living thing. . ."

"Then—then it's a Martian?" the girl whispered, fascinated.

"Not entirely. It's a hybrid, born of two worlds. Martian life cells fertilized by earth sperm. Naturally, we can only reproduce the chemical substances we know on our own planet. We've no means of knowing what a Martian sperm would be like. . . Call it a half breed."

TO Lance's surprise the girl gave a little shudder. The thing in the case had uncoiled very slightly. Dimly, she could already make out the vague details of head, shoulders, and arms.

"I think it is basically cellulose," Lance murmured pensively. "Pure cellulose, wherein it differs from our own type of life."

"It's horrible!" Vera's declaration was dimly emphatic. "It's time you scientists stopped playing around with things like this! What good is there in it, anyway?"

"Plently! There will be certain strong hereditary tendencies in the full grown creature. From him we may be able to reconstruct the history of Mars, learn the red planet's secrets, learn why his cell clusters, along with five others, were removed from female Martians to be buried in a vault. There's no end to what we might discover. Notice his

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metabolism—it's terrific.'

"He seems to be growing even as I look at him," Vera admitted dubiously.

"In a week, at this speed, he'l have reached maturity!" Lance's eyes were shining at the speculation. "I think there is a reason for such speed, too. Martian cells mature at a terrific pace because they have an inherited strain to work against gravity far less than ours. Though the gravity here is of course earth normal, I believe those cells are constructed to work with terrific energy against that drag, producing growth far faster than anything we know."

Vera sighed a little. "I suppose," she said slowly, "I ought to be interested, but somehow I'm not. Despite the science of this year of 1987 I think some things are better left alone. It piques me to think that our theater date was cancelled because of a glorified worm."

Lance put an arm about her shoulders. "Don't take it too hard, honey. This experiment if properly conducted may put me right in line for being boss of this Institute. That means plenty of money for us, I've got to give this thing all the attention I can. I've even made arrangements to sleep in the building for the time being in case of sudden developments. In a week the experiment will be finished. . . I've got your penknife for good luck," he finished, smiling, and pulled a much worn pearl handled knife from his smock.

The girl laughed a little. "You *do* rely on that, don't you?" she said. "Still I appreciate the thought—that my present to you last Christmas should bring you luck. Better than rabbit's feet and all that kind of old fashioned stuff. . ." She broke off and gave a little shrug. "Well, I think I know the truth now. Guess the only thing I can do is be a good little girl and not bother you for a week—but if you postpone me again after that I'll walk out on you forever!"

Lance hugged her gently to him. "I won't do it again," he murmured. "That's a promise. . ."

VERA went quite effectually out of Lance's life during the week that followed—her business firm sent her on an urgent mission to Philadelphia, from which she only returned to New York late on the Saturday night. Before she thought of her own apartment she headed direct for the Public Laboratories, met the janitor as usual in the hallway with his bucket and mop.

"Just a minute, Miss Crawford!" He caught the girl's arm as she made to pass by. Surprised, she stopped.

"What's wrong, Briggs? I was going along to see Lance."

"Ay, I know—but I don't think you *oughta*." The old man's rheumy eyes searched her face. He glanced quickly toward the solitary laboratory door at the end of the passage.

"Mr. Halworthy's been acting strange these last few days," he went on anxiously. "This morning we found him in the lab. all bent up like a man who's had a terrific disappointment. He'd smashed the case too that had that horrible thing inside it—I reckon the experiment failed and he got savage. That's what the staff think. Several times today he's been out, carrying stuff. Once he had a sack full of stuff on his shoulder—"

"Well, so what?" the girl asked, impatient at the old fellow's rambling talk. "His car's outside, I notice. What's the matter, anyway?"

"I dunno. . ." Briggs ruminated. "He's locked himself in that laboratory, and won't come out. Now no man should do that—"

"I'll get him," Vera broke in quickly. "Thanks for the news, anyway."

She swung round and headed for the laboratory door, rapped on the panels.

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"Lance, let me in! It's me—Vera. Open up!"

For a second or two there was no response, then came the sound of quick footsteps. The lock clicked and the door opened gently. The girl slipped inside and closed the door quietly, turned to face Lance. . .

To her surprise he was neither weary nor dishevelled. Instead he was remarkably neat, dressed in his best suit, his black hair brushed firmly into place. Only his face, deathlike in its pallor, seemed to indicate some hidden strain.

Vera glanced past him for a moment towards the smashed case wherein the Martian embryo had been growing. She turned back again, smiling sympathetically.

"Then it failed, Lance?"

"Partly," he answered rather ambiguously, and frowned for a moment. Then his blue eyes turned to the girl with a brooding stare. Somehow she didn't like that stare: it had not the calm, balanced intensity she usually admired. In some way it was furtive, yet in another, paradoxically enough, it was masterful.

"Well, I—er—" She hesitated, vaguely puzzled. Then asked as brightly as she could, "Well, what do we do now? No good moping around here, is it? Besides, you're all dressed to go out. Maybe you were expecting me?"

He nodded very slowly. "Yes—I was expecting you." Again he studied her in silence, then suddenly he seemed to make up his mind.

"I've something important to show you. Come with me."

He put on hat and coat, then took her arm in a tight grip. Puzzled but submissive she marched beside him as they left the building: she noticed he completely ignored Briggs—went right out to his parked car and held the door open.

"Hop in," he ordered briefly, then he settled beside her and started up the engine. . .

"But where are we going?" she demanded, as he drove away from the main street leading to the heart of the town.

"I've an experimental cellar over on the east side which you've never known anything about," he answered shortly. "I've got something there that's going to interest you. . ."

"Oh. . ." Vera became silent, inwardly perplexed. For a reason she could not understand she felt oddly afraid. Lance's manner was so strange, his voice so cold and jerky. It seemed that some deep inner emotion was holding him . . .

HER wonderment deepened as he skillfully swept the car in and out of side roads, skirted the edge of the city center, and at last drove into the dingy regions of a deserted quarter of the east side. She gazed out frowning, on long disused graneries and almost windowless, obsolete factories. . . At length they came to a drearily lighted stretch of harbor wharf. Lance pulled up with a jerk and scrambled out.

He helped the girl to alight. Mist clung around them, full of the oily odor of the harbor waters slapping round wooden columns beneath their feet.

"Where on earth are we?" Vera whispered, turning up her collar.

"This way," was Lance's brief answer, and he led her down a gloomy stretch of alley way to a solitary, shadowy building. He stopped before an old and grimy window, raised the sash and climbed through, helping her in after him.

"Used to be a chemical storage warehouse," he said curtly, and pulling out his torch flashed it around long forgotten supplies against the wall. There were straw wrapped acid bottles, coated

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in dust, crates falling to pieces from disuse.

"Useful place," he went on, in the same short way. "Nobody ever comes here—that's why I use it. My cellar is down below here."

He strode to an iron ring in the floor and lifted up a square of stone, waved his beam down a flight of mildewed steps. Filled with growing doubts the girl obeyed his behest to descend, went down into a huge cellar, obviously long forgotten, its floor thickly coated with dust. Against the walls were tiny iron gratings for ventilation.

Carefully Lance lowered the stone back into place, waved his torch beam on the walls, allowed it to halt at length on a massive dusty chain stapled to the brickwork. At the end of the chain was a circle of metal with a heavy padlock in its center.

A little chill crept through Vera as she stared at it. She turned suddenly.

"What's that for?"

"Dunno—unless perhaps wild animals were once stored down here. No telling."

"And—and you experiment in this awful place?"

"I *shall*," Lance answered very slowly, and in the reflected torch beam Vera saw his eyes very cold and clear watching her. His face too was different—set and hard, with a mouth compressed into a tight, cruel line. Her fear leaped suddenly to the surface.

"Lance," she whispered, her throat dry, "what's come over you? Why do you look at me like that? I—"

Then she broke off with a sudden scream as, dropping his torch to the floor, he suddenly seized her arms in a grip of iron, forced her backward relentlessly.

She kicked and struggled as she was lifted from her feet and hurled against the wall. Something of rigid hardness snapped round her waist with a sharp click. Once that happened, Lance released her and she stared dumbly down to see that circlet of metal round her middle, the padlock securely snapped in position. . . With a faint grin Lance dropped the key in his pocket, picked his torch up and stood surveying her.

"Lance, let me go!" she screamed hoarsely. "Lance, you—"

"Shut up!" he broke in curtly. "You'll be safe enough like that for the moment. I'm not trying to hurt you—nor do I intend to. Just that I prefer you locked up for the moment. I'm leaving you now. I'll be back shortly."

"Not alone—like this!" she shouted desperately.

"Yes," he said stonily, and with that he turned. Horrified, Vera watched him go with his torch up to the slab in the roof. Then it closed down and she was alone in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

Vera Learns the Truth

FOR several seconds the stunning shock of her position did not penetrate — then gradually vitality and awareness returned to her. With a savage desperation she twisted and turned on the chain holding her, tore at the manacle of steel round her waist—but nothing yielded in the slightest. The lock, what little she could see of it in the dim light filtering through the ventilators, was a brand new one, self locking, only released by the key Lance had in his pocket. Then he had deliberately bought it to hold her!

Weakly she relaxed, sank down slowly to the stone floor and tried vainly to figure out what was wrong, what Lance was getting at, what had happened to him during the Martian experiment to make him behave so queerly. Solution failed her. She finally gave herself up

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to fearful waiting—then after what seemed eternities sounds reached her, the circle of the torch appeared in the roof.

Scrambling to her feet she called huskily.

"Lance, in Heaven's name what are you trying to do? Release me—please! *Please!*"

He took no notice. She fell quiet, watching him as he moved around. He made several journeys up above, each time bringing down a piece of apparatus that glittered brightly in the light of the torch. He was engaged on the job for at least an hour, then apparently satisfied, the stone back in place, he came forward. With unwavering steadiness he pointed the torch beam at the girl and she slitted her eyes against the glare.

"Before you have something to eat there is something you must see," he said, and his voice was very slow and gentle now. Gradually he turned the torch back towards himself, held it below his face so that the girl saw only his eyes thrown in relief.

"Look at me!" he commanded, going closer to her. "Look at me very steadily.

She tried to look everywhere else but at those eyes. She tried to scream, and could not—tried to speak but her tongue was still. Everywhere was black: there was only those two eyes. She felt forced to stare into them, and the longer she stared the more she felt her senses were reeling. . .

The darkness became shot with bars of light. Her head began to ache intolerably. Then, with dazed wonderment, she realized she was somehow a detached observer of events unknown. . .

THE cellar had gone. Instead she gazed, from a considerable height apparently, upon an ocher red planet—now not a dead world streaked with the lines of drying canals, but a world of seas and continents like Earth. It teemed with life in every direction, bore the mark of prosperity upon it—

Then out of nowhere came sudden cataclysm and destruction!

Writhing skies, hurtling bolts of electric energy, incredible flame and winds. Cities crumbled like decks of cards, oceans boiled and whirled upwards. Martians, weirdly fashioned, died by the untold thousands. . .

The view switched to a green world—Earth. Earth receded until it assumed its proper planetary perspective in the cosmos. Earth and Mars were both in view, but between them, clear against the ebony black of space, was a plainly visible green bar that seemed to connect the two worlds together.

From somewhere a voice was talking, low and droning.

"Centuries ago Earth was dry, even as Mars is today. It came about because a stupendous inner expansion of gases started a great fault across the world, which caused the mountains of the present day—otherwise Earth would be flat, as Mars is. The fault sent water pouring into the Earth's hot interior. There was a conflict of titanic forces. Earth's seas were converted into steam, blasted forth with such terrific power that they went far beyond atmospheric limits into space, never to return.

"There was rain afterwards, but utterly insufficient to provide the world with the seas it had lost. At that time life of a very high intelligence existed on the Earth, the cities of which people are still found in part today. Those minds understood the forces of the cosmos, moulded machinery and, to replenish the Earth robbed Mars of its seas and practically all its atmosphere. The Deluge of Biblical history refers to the coming of the Martian seas to Earth through electrically devised space tubes.

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Nearly every Martian was destroyed.

"A few survived. Someday, presumably scientists would come to the red planet and conduct a thorough investigation. It was decided that life cells should be removed from several chosen female Martians and be sealed in the tallest towers of the city. As time passed, the cities sank under the sand—but at last one set of cells was found, was artificially fertilized and brought to life.

But the deep rooted Martian hereditary strain remained — remembrance, and desire for revenge. To destroy Earth, even as in the dim past it had overthrown Mars for its own selfish ends. . . ."

VERA felt herself slowly floating back to the consciousness of her own self. Lance's eyes were still watching her, but their mesmeric power had gone. Incredulously she realized that he had literally hypnotized her into seeing those things, those visions of another long dead world. Hypnotism of a power beyond all normal bounds.

"Before the Martian died I learned these things," he said slowly. "He changed me—willed me to perform a certain task in life. I was ordered to avenge, and nothing can stop me!"

For a long time the girl stood in silence. Strange thoughts were battering at the back of her mind.

"Then—then the Martian spoke to you in English?" she faltered.

"No: he hypnotized me just as I have just done with you. I saw what you have seen. Then something happened to my brain. I was given certain scientific secrets and commanded to avenge. It was an inescapable order. . . . Then the Martian died. Atmospheric pressure was wrong—I think I went mad. I destroyed the corpse and smashed the case. . . ."

"And why should I be fastened up like a criminal?" Vera demanded curtly.

Lance moved forward and unfastened the padlock, released her with a quiet movement.

"It was only while I was absent. I can't allow you to escape until my work is finished. Had you done so you might have died with the rest of the people, and I don't want that."

"Died?" She stared at him blankly. He smiled coldly.

"I have rather an ingenious plan to follow out," he explained. "The Martian outlined it to me. The atmosphere, as you may know is made up of oxygen and nitrogen, both retaining their ability to stay isolated. The nitrogen takes up four fifths of the atmospheric volume and it also prevents the savage burning of energy which would take place with only oxygen present.

"Now, under certain conditions, nitrogen will unite with oxygen to produce N_2O, nitrous oxide—better known as laughing gas. But, fortunately for human beings, this unity does not take place in the normal atmosphere. The production of two atoms of nitrogen to one of oxygen can only be accomplished as a rule by terrific heat or a lightning flash. The latter means obviously indicates electricity — but it is not the strength of the voltage which is so essential to produce a unity but the length of the ether wave disturbing the basic atoms to a common unity.

"It does not require vast machinery to unite oxygen and nitrogen in the proportions of two to one; it merely requires the electric energy of a specified wavelength. That wavelength was given to me by the Martian. Right here I have the machinery necessary for the job, brought from the laboratory. That was where I went when I left you. Deep under this cellar is a sluice from the harbor, strong enough to run that small turbogenerator there . . ."

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"But what are you going to *do?*" Vera cried.

"Isn't it obvious? An electrical wavelength generated from here will pass through the intervening concrete and affect the atmosphere in whatever direction it is aimed. More than that—the atmosphere is never still. It moves ceaselessly, with a circular whirlpool motion. Imagine then that part of the atmosphere immediately over us is altered in its basic elements—the nitrogen combines with the oxygen. The changed area drifts onward and another atmospheric area floats into position to be likewise changed. Gradually an increasing expanse of nitrous oxide will be on the move. Around New York there will begin to settle an atmosphere that is actually anaesthetic . . . and which will never alter once the combination is effectually started."

VERA could only stare in dazed horror. The words she uttered were scarcely audible.

"You mean poison the atmosphere of the whole *world?*"

"The whole world will take a long time," Lance said, brooding. "I propose to wipe out city after city. First, this great metropolis—then unless the atmosphere has drifted to other cities, I shall attack them as well. Little by little I'll destroy them all—wipe out humanity entirely."

"But it's fantastic—impossible!"

"Not at all. I have the apparatus and I know the wavelength. The rest is merely continuing the duty the Martian assigned to me."

"You can't do it, Lance!" The girl seized his arms in sudden desperation. "Lance—you can't do it! You've gone mad, or are hypnotized, or something. . . . Besides, even supposing you tried to get away with this, don't forget that humanity will wear gas-masks for protection. They'll go underground . . ." she wound up desperately.

"Gas-masks were ruled out with the Peace Pact of ten years ago," he answered grimly. "Humanity will fly underground, I agree—but in time the gas will reach them. In five years not a thing will be alive on the planet, except you and I. Then we'll talk further. We have masks," he finished quietly, nodding to them as they lay on the floor. "They're laboratory masks, and quite effective."

Vera stared at them, frowned momentarily. "But there are three masks there—not two—"

"I believe in being prepared . . ."

CHAPTER III

Vera Makes a Discovery

LANCE turned suddenly, and motioned the girl across the cellar.

"Better eat something," he said briefly, picking up a tin of corned beef from the supplies he had brought along. "I'll bring some more tinned stuff later. This will do for now . . ."

Vera took the tin from him, began to twist the key in her slim fingers. The strip of tin snapped off. Impatiently she swung on Lance as he stood surveying his machinery in the torchlight.

"Here—you open it," she said brusquely. "You've a can opener on that pocket knife of yours . . ."

He felt in his pockets and shrugged. "Guess I've left it behind . . ."

"What! Your lucky mascot, and on an occasion like this!" Vera stared at him incredulously. He failed to return her look, took the tin, then picked up a short, blunt bar of steel from his equipment and rammed it into the gap—rather too vigorously, for he misapplied the pressure and slashed his palm along the jagged tin edge.

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Vera winced in sympathy with him, knew instinctively that that cut had gone to the bone. Almost automatically she tugged out her handkerchief . . . then it dropped from her fingers as Lance merely shook his hand a little and went on pulling. At last he had the tin open, threw away the lid.

"Didn't—didn't you cut yourself?" Vera stammered, dumbfounded.

He shook his head slowly as he handed the tin to her. She saw quite clearly his hand was not even marked.

She took the tin absently, was hardly aware how she started to eat. She had a remembrance of raking out the stuff from the tin and of drinking some unpleasantly fizzy pop—but it was not her physical reactions that were concerning her. She was thinking—hard, fitting together certain little odd incidents and remembering half forgotten facts.

The three gasmasks, the missing penknife, and now a hand that should have been cut, and was not. And the memory of that all powerful hypnotism: the even remoter memory of something about cellulose . . .

"SAY, any objections if I walk around?" she asked suddenly.

"None at all—but don't try and escape." Lance was too busy with his machinery to take much notice of her.

She turned and strolled casually enough along the length of the cellar, going further and further into the deeper shadows at the remote end. Once or twice she glanced back to behold Lance still busy with his apparatus—

Then suddenly she stopped, her heart beating faster. The cellar was not complete in itself. At its remoter end was a massive, ancient door, obviously leading to yet another underground place beyond. The girl regarded it thoughtfully for a moment, then stared at the dust ridden floor. She stooped, stared fixedly at two long troughs gouged into the film, troughs such as heels might make if a body were dragged! And they vanished right at that door!

The sack Lance had carried from the laboratory which the janitor had seen . . .? Vera's eyes narrowed in thought. She tried the door; it was locked. Just in time she turned back to Lance as he stood regarding her suspiciously.

"Satisfied?" he demanded bluntly, as she came up to him.

She nodded slowly, glanced at the short metal bar he had used to open the tin. Then she stood in silence until the interest of his machinery got him again. Slowly, without distracting his attention, she picked the bar up. It was comfortably heavy in her hand. . . .

It took all her courage to perform the next action. With every ounce of her strength she whirled the bar through the air directly on the back of the head in front of her. Lance dropped instantly, to the floor.

In a moment the girl was down on her knees, searched through his pockets and pulled out every key she could find, then holding out the one that obviously fitted the cellar door she raced towards it, torch in her free hand.

The lock turned under the key. She saw as she swung the door wide that it was of tremendous thickness—clearly explained why no sounds, if her guess was right, had penetrated through.

A figure against the far wall turned slowly as she flashed her torch before her—a figure only half dressed and shackled to the wall by chain and waist manacle, even as she had been.

"Lance!" she screamed. "Lance! It *is* you! I was right. . . ."

INSTANTLY she flung herself forward, searched through the keys

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until she found the right one to the manacle. Lance tore it aside, flung the tumbled hair from before his eyes.

"What—what on earth are you doing here?" he demanded. "Did that devil capture you as well, then?"

"I walked into it," she answered quickly. "But tell me, how are you? O. K.?"

"Considering everything, yes—but how'd you find me?"

"A hunch, I guess—in fact several hunches. Finally I was convinced that that thing in there wasn't you—but a perfect imitation. It's the Martian, isn't it, and it carried you from the laboratory in a sack?"

Lance nodded grimly. "When it reached maturity it smashed open its case and attacked me. I tore out my knife to save myself but I wasn't quick enough. It hypnotized me, drained my mind of every thought, learned the language—everything. I was shown its whole scheme of vengeance. It told me it would preserve my life because it had more to learn from me. Then, completely under hypnotic control, I was forced to provide the thing with clothes. I went home and got them for it. Then it took me away in a sack, and I couldn't raise a finger to help myself. Some kind of instinct led the thing to this out of the way spot. I got chained up and—" Lance broke off, shrugged. "That's all there is to it."

"For my part," Vera said, "I remembered you saying the thing was pure cellulose. I also remember from my science school days that cellulose can do almost anything from imitating any known object to adapting itself to any known condition. I was finally convinced the thing *was* cellulose when it cut itself and almost instantly healed itself by adaption to the circumstance. Somehow, I realized, the thing had imitated you—"

"Exactly," Lance broke in quickly. "It has Martian intelligence of terrific power: it patterned itself after the nearest living object because of its earthly fertilization. *I* was the object. . . . But—but how did you escape from it?" he demanded in amazement.

"I hit it on the head so hard and so suddenly it hadn't the chance to adapt itself. It's planning world destruction and—"

"I know," Lance broke in seriously. "We've got to . . ."

He broke off suddenly and gripped the girl's arm. The Martian was standing in the doorway, set faced, eyes glittering.

"Run!" Lance commanded suddenly. "We can't fight this thing. Follow me!"

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the words he hurled the torch straight at the creature: it took it off guard, sent it reeling to one side. In that split second Lance and the girl were through the doorway, stumbled across the black cellar and up the steps to the stone trap. Behind them the Martian's footsteps were pursuing.

Desperately Lance pushed up the stone, flung it to one side, then dragged Vera up behind him—almost hurled her to the open window giving egress to the wharf outside. She got through, but not so Lance. A terrific pain stabbed through his skull as the tremendous hypnotic power of the Martian smote on his nerve centers. He reeled dizzily, came up hard with his back against bellying masses wrapped in straw.

Dimly a thought revolved in his mind. No ordinary weapons would kill this infinitely assimilative creature—But acid? Acid and cellulose . . .? With a last desperate effort he hurled over the bottle nearest to him and forced himself back.

Fuming, spurting smoke rose on the

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air, thick with acrid fumes. At that same moment the Martian came forward. He slipped in the sizzling liquid on the concrete, fell face down into it. . . .

Sickened and half blinded Lance staggered round the dry portion to the window, scream after scream ringing in his ears as the deadly stuff decomposed the cellulose hybrid far faster than its assimilative powers could build themselves up to the sudden change.

Somehow, Lance realized he got through the window, stood sucking in great lungfuls of air. The girl's arm was on his shoulders. Things were quieter now: the screamings had ceased.

"Naturally, cellulose dissolves almost instantaneously in nitric acid," Lance muttered, when he got his breath back. He stared into the dark space through the window. "Whoever forgot those acid jars didn't realize they'd saved the world," he went on slowly. "And you, dearest . . . Beyond question the Martian only spared your life with ideas of later matehood. He meant to save me too to drain my mind of all earthly knowledge. Hence the three gasmasks and—"

"Forget it," the girl whispered. "It's over. The car's round the corner. Drive home and I'll slip in and get you an overcoat. Then we can come back and throw that machinery into the harbor or somewhere. . . ."

« STRANGE, BUT TRUE »

THE ability of the Japanese to take up the ways, methods and mannerisms of his western brethren has long been legend. There have been countless instances in which his quick pick-up of the western how-to-make-a-dollar philosophy has turned Mr. Average Moto a neat bit of change.

But one of the most magnificently commercial ventures made by a Jap to date was revealed not so long ago when startled Nippon citizens found themselves possessing match boxes which bore the legend "Down With Japan." Tracing these boxes down, the Jap police found that a Nippon manufacturer had produced them in the very heart of Tokyo.

However, the manufacturer proved that he wasn't conspiring revolt against his country. He explained, red faced, that the matches hadn't been meant for Jap consumption at all. They were intended for Chinese delivery, where, the manufacturer figured logically enough, boxes bearing such a slogan would sell like hotcakes!

Police proved his story authentic, when their checks revealed that two shipments had gotten crossed, and that the one intended for China had remained in Japan! Clever people, these Japanese!

THE old-time prospector who used a divining rod to discover gold deposits has for years been considered a little batty in the belfry by most scientists. Yet modern medicine men of science have conjured up a new trick that bids to outdo the old divining rod in its mysticism. These scientists have been burning vegetables as the latest wrinkle in exploring for that liquid gold, better known of as petroleum.

Several noted chemists have discovered that certain plants have a tendency to absorb particular basic chemical elements from the soil. If these elements are present in a specific underground formation at one oil field, and if analysis of plant ashes in another location also shows them, the inference is fair that the same geologic formation is buried under the spot where the plants grow.

In common everyday parlance, then, if plants over oil bearing ground are like the plants from the tested ground in chemical content, there should be oil on this spot—at least that's what the scientists hope.

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In the January, 1971 *AMAZING STORIES*— The stunning conclusion of Bob Shaw's new novel, ONE MILLION TOMORROWS! *Plus* J. T. McIntosh's ALMOST HUMAN, Howard L. Myers' SOUL AFFRIGHTED, and Allen Rivers' THE VOLUNTEER!

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INTERPLANETARY

CHAPTER I

The Strange Planet

THERE she was: just like a picture postcard. The Earth looming hazily through her thin blanket of atmosphere, the moon, floating gracefully to one side and the brilliant sun cradled in its nimbus of reds, greens and yellows that made up the corona.

Passengers aboard the giant Tunard space liner voiced the *ohs* and *ahs* that had become so familiar to Brice Lucas during his five years as first pilot on the *Amphitryon*.

Lucas could sympathize with the passengers. He had felt the same way years ago when he first saw the sight from one million miles out on the Earth-Mars orbit. He had felt the powerful fascination of the view, dwarfing him into insignificance; he had sensed the ageless wonder of its existence long before there had been man to observe it. But Lucas had learned early in his career that this sight marked the beginning of danger.

The universe and its ways are ruthless, cruel without mercy, possessing the depravity of a senseless machine bent on destruction. Space flight is not new, for five hundred years have elapsed since the first flight from the earth to the moon in 2039, but each milestone of progress since that time has been marked by tragedy, heroism and sacrifice.

Man still has failed in his attempts to solve all laws governing the forces of interstellar space. Interplanetary flight constantly is confronted with new conditions, new circumstances that demanded every ounce of skill and often human lives to overcome. Accidents are fewer now, but they are not unheard of. Mysterious, baffling forces still lurked unseen on the spaceways and no craft traveling in the interplanetary void is certain of reaching its destination.

"It—it's like a cobra, ready to strike: beautiful, fascinating, yet deadly!" came a half-whispered feminine voice at Lucas' elbow.

Brice Lucas wheeled.

"You're not—" he began, intending

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GRAVEYARD

By R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

Before them loomed the Earth and safety, then, with the speed of light they found themselves trapped in the gravity field of an incredible world known as Procrustes.

Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

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to tell the young woman that no passengers were allowed in the control cabin during flight. But he did not finish. His eyes caught a glimpse of beauty: dark blue eyes, brown, fluffy hair, a delicate, turned up nose and sweetly pouted lips.

Women were infrequent travelers on interplanetary ships and those that did travel were rarely beautiful. But this girl proved that no generalization is quite accurate. She was, Lucas decided, the most beautiful woman he had seen in the many worlds he had visited.

Now Lucas recalled who she was. She was the daughter of the white headed old man who had boarded the ship in company with Oaxa Azil, the wealthy young Martian colonist.

"Please don't tell me to leave," she pleaded. "The view is so much better here. Of course, I know it's against the rules, but I'm not an ordinary passenger. My father, Wendel Layden, used to be a stockholder in the Tunard line."

Of course—the girl was Wyltha Layden, fiancée of Oaxa Azil, enroute to Mars where the wedding was scheduled to take place next month. It had been rumored that the girl was marrying Azil for his money—this girl, so pretty, so clear eyed and innocent looking.

"Yes," smiled Lucas cynically, "and your fiancé owns most of the stock in the line right now. I'm sorry, Miss Layden, but even in your case the rules can't be broken. Your safety and that of all the passengers is in my hands and every rule must be obeyed."

"But I won't bother you in the least!" insisted the girl, pouting.

Lucas decided that she was a spoiled brat. She couldn't be the sweet young thing she appeared to be—no woman who married for wealth could. Perhaps, after all, the rumors were wrong and the marriage was a love-match. Lucas almost laughed at the thought! Oaxa Azil betrayed his Martian blood in more ways than one. He looked more like a beast than a man, with scaly skin, greenish facial pigmentation, faceted eyes and vicious canine teeth. No beauty would wed that beast for reasons of love!

"Miss Layden!" began Lucas angrily. "Get out!"

"There's no reason for you to talk to my fiancée like that!" came a hoarse voice from the doorway.

Oaxa Azil, his eyes sparking the hate that was so common among young Martians for their more-handsome, contemporary earthmen, entered the room.

"The order applies to you, too, sir!" snapped Lucas, unbecomingly. Lucas tried to fight it off, but he felt a resentment that Azil should claim this young woman as fiancée, even with her consent.

"Perhaps, my dear man, you're not aware of my position—" began Azil.

"I know who you are and I know you practically own the line," roared Lucas. "But I've legal authority to order you out of here while we're in interplanetary space. The lives of everyone on board are in my hands. Get—"

One of the instruments on the panel in front of Lucas emitted a shrill, buzzing noise. Instantly Lucas sprang to the controls, forgetting the passengers who had entered the room. His body tensed as he eyed gauges, dials and indicators massed in a bewildering embankment on the panel.

Lucas' arm shot out and grabbed a phone from its hook.

"Engine room!" he shouted. "Engine room! What's the matter! There's no need for acceleration now!"

Wyltha Layden glanced through the back port of the control cabin, built up from the top of the craft, like a conning tower of a submarine. A dim

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speck in the distance was the sun, which a few minutes before had loomed as big and as bright as terrestrial eyes had seen it from Earth. The sun's size now would indicate that in a space of less than two minutes the craft had traveled beyond Mars' orbit.

Such a speed would indicate that the *Amphitryon* had exceeded the velocity of light!

The girl's eyes swept toward the front port. There, dead ahead, appeared the shining disc of a planet. But it was no planet familiar to the girl. It lacked the redness of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn and the canals of Mars. Whatever planet it was, it was close and at the terrific speed the craft must have traveled in the past few minutes, the *Amphitryon* would crash in a few seconds!

"Cut blasts!" screamed Oaxa Azil, his face turning from green to livid blue.

Lucas replaced the telephone on its hook.

"They've been cut!" snapped the pilot. "If you two had kept out of this cabin, as you've had orders to do, I might have avoided this trouble!"

"Trouble?" Azil's voice trembled with fear.

"Come Oaxa," said the girl. "I guess we were wrong. Let's get out of here now, before anything else happens."

Lucas noted with a slight sense of satisfaction that there was no tenderness in the way Wyltha looked at her fiancé. Only contempt.

"No you don't!" announced the pilot, springing to the doorway and snapping the lock. "You two will stay here—until Mr. Azil cools off at least. I won't let you go below in a mortal funk, perhaps throwing the other passengers into a panic!"

Lucas picked up his phone again and dialed a connection with the loud speaker system of the space liner.

"All passengers to their quarters while course corrections are being made!" the pilot announced. "A slight miscalculation has made adjustments necessary."

As he finished a gentle rap sounded at the doorway.

"Who is it?" asked Lucas.

"It's me—Jim," came the ungrammatical reply. "I've Wendel Layden with me. He says there's something screwy about that planet that's dead ahead and he wants to explain."

CHAPTER II

The Dead Spot in Space

WENDEL LAYDEN was a white-haired, mild mannered old man, who had made a fortune in the passenger service between Mars and Earth, only to lose everything he made in a wildcat mining venture on Martian soil. He was known to the younger generation of pilots and spacemen only by legend, but it was said that no man had traveled more widely in the solar system, nor had faced death more times.

Layden watched Lucas bring the craft around, facing outward away from the mysterious planet. The maneuver was completed through the use of small steering rockets, with the large, atomic power rockets silent. At the conclusion of the turning, Lucas stepped toward the telephone to order the resumption of power, but Layden put his hand on the pilot's shoulder.

"Don't try it yet," he said.

"Why not?" asked the pilot.

"If this planet is Procrustes, it won't do any good," replied Layden, glancing at his daughter. The girl had moved away from her Martian companion and was standing near Lucas, wide eyed in some sudden realization.

"There's no planet by that name,

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Layden," replied Lucas. "And if there were, our rocket motors could get out of her sphere of attraction."

Layden shrugged.

"Go ahead, then," he replied.

Once more the rockets sent trembling vibrations through the ship. Instruments showed an exhaust velocity that should have sent the craft scudding outward into the spaceways. But Procrustes, behind them now, grew no smaller and the dim, pin-point of the sun far ahead grew no brighter.

"Something's the matter with the mixture—we're getting no acceleration!" exclaimed Lucas. "I suppose we'd better land on this thing—asteroid or whatever it is—and make some repairs."

Layden shook his head as the craft once more was wheeled about. Again the rocket motors sent volcanic blasts into the ether—this time with the ship's nose pointed toward Procrustes. But the planet grew no nearer.

"We're stuck!" exclaimed Jim Vorhees, the second pilot. "Something's holding us here!"

Lucas glanced at Layden, who nodded.

"I nearly got stuck here once before," said Layden. "I've named this planet Procrustes, the dead spot in the universe, where no laws seem to be in force!"

"How did you get away?" asked Lucas.

"I didn't get as close as you are, or I'd never have gotten away," said Layden. "But I got close enough so that I used all my fuel and drifted for nearly a month until a patrol ship found me and towed me into port."

"What is it? What's happened?" demanded Azil, nervously.

"Something we'll never escape," grinned Layden, "for which I thank God—not that I don't feel sorry for these people that are stuck with us, but I'd rather see my daughter dead than married to you!"

"Father!"

An icy stillness closed in over the cabin as the girl screamed.

"Father!" she choked. "I was doing it for you! You'd lost everything and you couldn't spend your old age penniless!"

"I couldn't dissuade you, daughter," said Layden. "But you don't have to marry him now."

"You—you mean we'll die?" gasped Oaxa Azil. The loss of his sweetheart was not affecting him nearly as much as the idea of doom.

"Probably by slow starvation," nodded Layden. "At least it will be slow. You see, we're stuck in spacial mud—so to speak—and it'll hold us tighter than any terrestrial mud you've ever seen, because of a peculiar magnetic phenomenon that is inherent to Procrustes."

All eyes gazed out of the porthole toward the planet. It had an atmosphere, probably continents, oceans, rivers, and maybe inhabitatants.

"But you can't land on it," said Layden, reading the thoughts of that little group in the control cabin. "We're as close and as far away as we'll ever get."

"But our rockets—" began Jim Vorhees.

"Are about as useful as a tin whistle," said Layden.

"There's a funny thing about this world. Magnetic conditions in the vicinity of the planet operate along the same lines as the Fitzgerald contraction, only, of course, it's quite different.

"The nearer we get to the planet, the closer the atoms in our bodies are packed. As a result we get smaller, but we don't realize it. We only know that the relative distance to the planet remains the same. No matter how close

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we go to the planet, we'd still be just as far away, because the nearer we get, the smaller we become. Our ship, our rocket fuel, our instruments, everything decreases in the same proportion."

"Then why can't we turn around and sail away?" asked Lucas.

"Because there is, in some way I can't quite explain, a similar decrease in mass. The decrease in mass doesn't enter into our problem when we're going toward the planet, because the contraction takes care of everything. But going away, we will find that our rockets, fuel and driving power is far too small to send the front end of the craft through space. The front end of the ship is expanded far beyond what the rocket motors, decreased and shrunken in the rear of the ship, can push."

"Could we spiral out?" asked Jim.

"No, because the rocket power nearest the planet would be decreased and the rocket power furthest from the planet would be increased—the ship would be driven in, toward the planet despite our attempts to move away."

"I don't believe it!" snarled Azil. "Such a thing is impossible!"

"Well," drawled Layden, "you saw these pilots try to get us out of here just a few minutes ago, and you saw what luck they had. In my case, I didn't come close enough to get completely mired by this planet, but I got too close for comfort. That's why I named it Procrustes — after the Greek that stretched and shrunk his guests to fit a bed he prepared for them."

"Why isn't this planet visible to telescopes on earth?" asked Lucas.

"It really isn't much larger than a meteorite," declared Layden. "But the shrinking effect renders its size larger as we get closer to it. You see we shrunk quite a bit in the minute or two after we entered its sphere of influence. During that time the distance from the sun and the earth seemed to increase—in reality they're not further away than before, but we're smaller and the miles are many times more miles—to us."

"Get us out of here!" begged Azil. "If you do, Lucas, I will make you a rich man—a very rich man."

It was a dismal little group that sat in the control cabin on the eve of the following day according to the chronometers in the cabin, which everyone knew had been affected by the shrinking process the same as everything else. No one really knew whether it was a day or five minutes since the ship had mired in the Procrustes' grip.

Lucas and Vorhees were at the controls, keeping the ship pointed outward, away from Procrustes.

Nearby sat Wyltha Layden, beside her father. In a corner, alone in a cowardly funk, sat the Martian, Oaxa Azil.

During the past few hours the girl had proven herself to be of stern stuff. She had buoyed up spirits of passengers, locked in their cabins to prevent panic, and she had assisted in every way possible in attacking the problem that presented itself.

"I've got an idea," said Lucas slowly, "of how to get out of this fix!"

Everyone was on his feet in an instant, pressing Lucas for details. He held up his hand for silence.

"How far are we—in regular, full sized miles—from the earth?" Lucas asked Layden.

"Probably not much more than a million miles," said Layden. "That's the distance we were from Earth just before the sudden shrinking."

"A lifeboat could make it in a day, then?" asked Lucas.

"A lifeboat could if it could get away from Procrustes," replied Layden. "But it would have the same trouble getting away that the *Amphitryon* has

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had."

"There's a 40-passenger lifeboat stored underneath the ship," Lucas announced. "That will take care of everyone aboard. Jim you see that everyone gets aboard, but first take every crumb of food and every ounce of water, except enough to last one day, out of the boat. Then when every one goes aboard, see that they take only necessities. All extra clothing, all baggage and personal belongings must be left behind."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to switch the *Amphitryon* around facing Procrustes," said Lucas. "The lifeboat is going to get under her jets and I'm going to give the craft full acceleration dead ahead. The force of the jets will toss the lifeboat away, out of the influence of Procrustes, like a chip of wood in the stream of a fire-hose."

"Yes, but who's going to stay behind and operate the rockets on the *Amphitryon?*" asked Jim.

"I am!" announced the pilot.

A dead silence crept over the group.

"You mean you'll stay behind on this ship—to die?"

"I'm the captain!" declared Brice Lucas, and his eyes carried a look that meant it.

The transfer was made to the lifeboat in an orderly manner. The passengers were reasonable and there was no panic, inasmuch as Lucas' plan was presented as the only possible way for an escape from the baffling forces that held the *Amphitryon* in a vise-like grip.

Finally the spacelocks of the liner were closed and Lucas walked into the control room.

"Brice! Brice Lucas!" The loudspeaker in the control room carried Jim Vorhees' voice.

"Okay, Jim!" replied Lucas into his radio microphone tuned to the lifeboat. "Are you ready?"

"Mr. Layden says his daughter isn't aboard. Is she with you?"

"Wyltha? Why no—"

Lucas eyes were drawn toward the door. There stood the girl training a pistol straight at the pilot's heart.

Before Lucas could utter a word, the girl reached toward the radio control panel and cut the microphone switch.

"Listen to me, Brice Lucas!" began the girl. "You're not going to get away with this, do you hear?"

"Get away with this?" replied the pilot. "Are you mad?"

"If you want those people in the lifeboat to get home safely, tell Vorhees that my father probably didn't see me and that I'm on the lifeboat!"

"But—"

"There isn't a minute to lose!" snapped the girl. "You want to be a hero and a martyr, do you, Brice Lucas? Well, you're not going to be one. And there isn't time to talk about it. Give the signals and open your rockets!"

"If I don't?"

"Then I'll shoot you dead, because you'll die anyhow much more slowly and with much more pain! And if I shoot you everyone in that lifeboat will die!"

"You win," said Lucas.

The girl opened the microphone switch again.

"I—I've looked everyplace, Jim," said the pilot. "Miss Layden isn't aboard the *Amphitryon.* Probably her father doesn't know where to find her. Okay. Let's go!"

With these words, Brice Lucas released the rockets. The craft trembled with the force of a mighty blast.

"All right!" smiled the girl. "Cut them!"

"But—"

"Cut them, I said!" The revolver

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moved menacingly.

Brice Lucas cut the rockets.

Suddenly the planet ahead of them grew smaller. It faded to a small disc and then disappeared.

"Look!" screamed the girl, pointing out the rear port of the control cabin.

A short distance ahead drifted the lifeboat, her rockets purring toward Earth. To the right gleamed Mars and to the left were the earth and the moon, shining once more in full glory.

"We're free!" gasped Wyltha incredulously.

Lucas grinned suddenly. "I get it!" he exclaimed. "It was gravity! Gravity pulled us away from Procrustes—the gravity of the lifeboat, made large once more!" *

He ceased speaking, and stared at the girl, his face suddenly sober. "Why did you stay aboard?" he asked suddenly.

The girl's eyes dropped. "For Dad —and myself," she whispered. "I just couldn't go to Oaxa Azil again, and if we were all saved, I would do it, for Dad, even though he wouldn't wish me to. But I still have my insurance, and it amounts to quite a bit. If I were dead, Dad would have enough to keep him the rest of his life. And I'd much rather provide for him that way than —than the other."

"You're a brick!" breathed Lucas in admiration.

But she remained sober, and he saw a despairing look in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" he queried.

She shrugged. "Nothing—except that now I'm right back where I started. . . ."

Lucas grinned as he turned to the controls. "No you aren't," he said softly. "You see, before I put Oaxa Azil in the life boat, I made him give your father a nice sizable check—for saving his life. I figured it was the best thing I could do for the injustice I did you."

"Injustice?" Her eyes were wide with amazement.

"Yeah, for thinking you were the sort of a woman who'd marry for money, and especially an ape like Oaxa Azil."

For an instant she stared at him, then she murmured: "You're something of a brick too, aren't you, Brice Lucas!"

* Lucas is correct in his explanation. Even the small lifeboat had a gravity constant. Everything in the universe, a giant sun or a single atom, exerts a gravitational pull on every other speck of cosmic dust.

In the vicinity of Procrustes, the *Amphitryon* had lost mass and was held by the gravitational pull of an ordinary-sized meteorite. Then the lifeboat, tossed away from the *Amphitryon* suddenly regained its size and, with this, its mass. The lifeboat's mass for an instant outweighed the parent ship and outpulled the forces of Procrustes. The *Amphitryon* was dragged away from the sinister forces that held it.—Ed.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

In the April, 1971 *FANTASTIC*— At last! The long-awaited sequel to *Phoenix Prime:* Ted White's WOLF QUEST, a complete short novel! *Plus* John Brunner's newest epic novella of the Traveller in Black, DREAD EMPIRE! *Also* new short stories by exciting young writers, and our usual provocative features!

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THE PIED PIPER OF SPACE

by S. M. TENNESHAW

Like rats fascinated by the pipes of a "pied piper of Hamlin" these space ships followed a mysterious lure to their doom!

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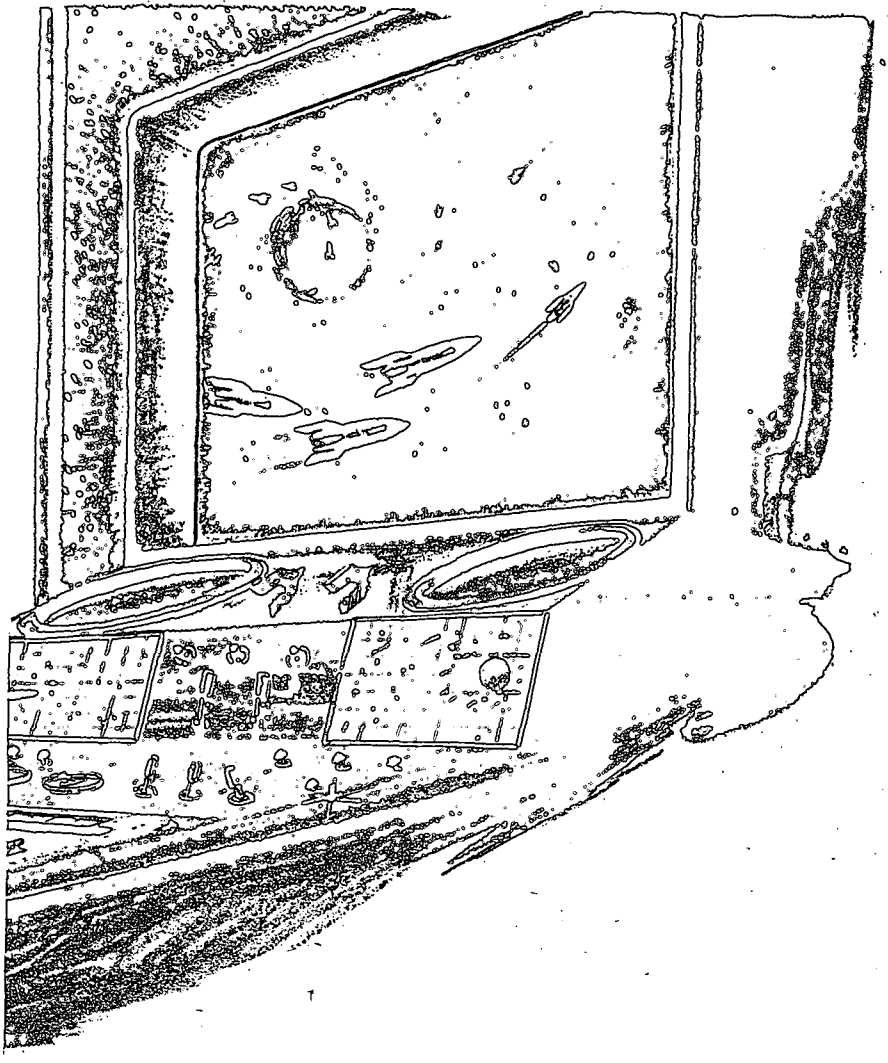

LIEUTENANT WILTON, there's hell to pay!" General Richard Galway sat stolidly behind his desk, his ordinarily ruddy features at the moment a curious mixture of green and white.

Lieutenant Sam Wilton took one look at General Galway's face and said: "Yessir," not knowing what the payment was for.

General Galway fumbled for a cigar and lit up. Puffs of smoke added to the explosive content of his words.

"Wilton, the Venusian fleet is attack-

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ing our bases on the Moon!"

"Huh?" Wilton gasped, forgetting to add the customary, *sir.*

The Venusian fleet attacking the Moon!

"And the Earthguard is in the Asteroid belt on maneuvers!" The General exploded. "Luna, in spite of its impregnable defenses, is practically unmanned. To put it bluntly, Lieutenant, we're caught napping!"

Like a meteor tearing out of space, the news hit Sam Wilton. "Good Lord, Sir," he exclaimed, "the Earthguard must be warned at once!"

"That," Galway replied bitterly, "is impossible."

"But—but the televisor . . ."

"The Venusians have every radio televisor set on Earth blanketed out. We are unable to get a message through to the fleet."

Lt. Wilton's mind reeled. Just a few short hours before there had been peace. No thought of war. Now . . . It was impossible to warn the Earthguard of the danger threatening Earth. Just a few short minutes. That was all. And the Solar System was plunging into a bloody chaos. Why? Because Venusians, that sadistic vibratory race of Barbarians were not content to stay in their own back yard.

The thoughts that sped through Sam Wilton's mind were not pleasant. The Venusians would capture the fortified bases on the Moon. From there they would take on an offensive directly against Earth. And Terra would fall before the savage onslaught of Venusian vibrations. Its cities would be devastated. Its peoples massacred. Sam Wilton clenched his fists and demanded harshly:

"But, damn it all, Sir,—isn't there anything we can do?"

General Galway nodded, his features grave.

"There is. That's why I sent for you. The Venusians have a blockade surrounding the Earth, and . . . Someone must run that blockade . . . We've got to get through to the fleet! I know that you and Mona want to get married. Man, here's a chance to prove yourself. I know it's asking a lot of you, but *someone has got to get through!*" General Galway slapped his palm against the desk. His haggard eyes watched Sam Wilton.

Lt. Wilton didn't say anything. He couldn't find anything to say. His mind was in a turmoil. Events had happened with disconcerting rapidity. The glad knowledge that he had gotten the old man's consent to marry his daughter was buried beneath the crushing load of the disaster threatening Earth. Those damned Venusians. Venusians. Over this thought another was struggling to take shape. What was it? . . .

"You'll be taking a tremendous risk," the General broke in on Sam Wilton's thoughts. "I'll not force you to go . . ."

Sam Wilton knew the import of those words. If he didn't go, a task that was almost sure death, he'd be branded a coward, and more than likely lose Mona. If he did go, he . . . He smiled grimly. It would take guts to run that gauntlet.

"Of course I'm going, sir. When do I leave?"

General Galway stood up and crossed around the desk. "Good! We need men with courage now more than ever before. Just remember that you carry the silent prayer of the whole Earth with you. I've had a speedy sub-cruiser made ready. You'll leave at once. And —good luck!"

Lt. Wilton squared his shoulders as he left General Galway's office, knowing that this was both a test and a challenge. A challenge to see what color his insides were and a test to see how

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much he could endure. Wilton gripped the General's hand. Then he wheeled about and strode from the room.

AS SAM WILTON reached the ship hangars, he was brought to a stop by the slim figure of a girl. It was Mona Galway. She was, thought Wilton, quite the most tempting morsel his eyes had ever had the pleasure of resting upon. Pert and pretty, with earnest brown eyes and flaxen hair, she stood there before him. A troubled frown clouded the smoothness of her forehead. She said tensely:

"Sam, you've heard about the Venusians? . . ."

He nodded. "Just saw your father. He told me everything."

The girl peered closely at him. "Sam! There's something you're not telling me. I can see by the look on your face. What is it? Has Dad put you up to anything?"

Wilton tried hard to avoid her searching gaze. He felt taut and miserable. Next to the service he loved this girl more than anything else in the world, and for her was going to run a gauntlet of dread Venusian warships. The chances of winning through were slim.

"Tell me, Sam!" Mona demanded, her white face and eyes distended with the fear born of an awful realization. "Tell me!"

Sam Wilton shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "You might as well know," he said. Then he told her of the task confronting him.

The girl's hand went to her throat. "Sam . . ."

"Earth is more important than either of us, Mona," Lt. Wilton replied. "What do we two count balanced against the lives of all the people on Earth?"

The daughter of a soldier, she nodded. But the pain in her eyes gave the lie to her gesture.

Sam looked at her for a long, aching instant. He wanted terribly to take her in his arms. But he knew it would only add to the pain of what might come later.

"Please be careful, Sam," was all she said. "And, good luck."

Sam Wilton attempted a smile as he left her standing there. It was a poor smile. Not at all the kind of smile he would have liked to present. But it was the best he could manage. Between every thought in his brain arose a haunting visage of a reptilian creature, emanating vibrations, a god-forsaken creation of a being—a Venusian. And his red blood boiled inside him. Savagely he swung back the port of the cruiser awaiting him. Noisily it clanged shut after him.

AS HE neared the outer layers of Earth's atmosphere, Lt. Sam Wilton's eyes narrowed. *He had to win through!* That thought kept hammering in his brain. The fate of Earth hung in the balance. He *must* reach the Earthguard, unsuspecting of the impending tragedy at manuevers off Saturn and the Asteroid belt.

The little suicide ship was painted a special light absorbing black that made it nearly invisible against the ebony curtain of space. Its dials, meters, and gauges were illuminated only by a dim phosphorescence; and the little glassite-enclosed cabin was totally dark. But Sam Wilton was not fool enough to underestimate the power of his enemy. A frown creased his forehead as he thought of the sensitive instruments the Venusians possessed. Instruments which could register the passage of a pebble-sized meteorite hundreds of miles away. He also knew that the Venusians would be watching those instruments.

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His heart singing a song of grim purpose, Lt. Sam Wilton darted through the star-flecked void. Now that the Earth's atmosphere was far behind, he increased the acceleration of his tiny ship. The breath left his lungs under the flattening pressure of the acceleration. Like an arrow released from a cosmic bow, his tiny craft winged through space.

Wilton gripped the controls with a force that whitened his hands. His eyes were burning slits as they raked the blackness of space for the moving pinpoints of light that would mean Venusian warships.

His ship blasted on.

Wilton began to feel confident of success. A song of exultation coursed through his body. He was making it! A grin tugged at the corners of his mouth. Those Venusians weren't so damned smart after all! And then the smile left his face. Two pinpoints of light detached themselves from the fixed brilliancy of the stars, and swerved toward his ship.

Rocket jets! The rocket jets of Venusian warships. They had spotted him!

Grim determination burning within him, Sam Wilton depressed the acceleration lever. Like a beast unleashed the ship darted forward. Down went the acceleration lever. Down. . . .

A signal flare of light from the foremost of the Venusian ships arched across his bows. That was a warning. "To hell with you, you dirty devils!" Sam Wilton ground out from between clenched teeth. Only death would stop him now.

A purple Belden ray sliced under him. Reacting instantly, he shot his ship up and around. The warships grew in size in an instant—and in the next were dwindling. His maneuver had taken place so fast it had caught them flat-footed. Before the Venusians could swing around and take up the chase from the rear, he was a vanishing dot in the void.

After a few moments Wilton glanced into his rear visor. The two warships were far behind him. His eyes lighted with triumph as he realized he was slowly but surely outdistancing them. Skillfully he blasted power into the port jets to give his ship an erratic, forward course. His ship was a zigzagging target, pulling away.

Behind him the Venusian warships let loose with everything they had. But Sam Wilton laughed. For he knew they were only wasting power.

Abruptly a bright object hurtled across his bows. Only instinctive reaction saved him. He twisted his ship up and out of the way. Looking behind he was chilled to see a large enemy mauler hurtling after him.

Wilton's thoughts reeled. He hadn't won through the blockade at all! He had only penetrated the outer fringes!

His entire body tingled as the tiny ship was caught in the glancing slice of a pale, silver beam. Alarm gripped him. "Paralysis ray!" he choked.

Wildly he sought to hurtle to safety. Even as he threw over the acceleration to the last notch, he knew it was hopeless. Again that silver beam caught and caressed his ship. For an agonizing instant Wilton fought to keep control of his senses. But, crushed by the intolerable weight of 9 g's acceleration, and laboring against the force of the paralysis beam, he sank into inky depths of oblivion.

Sam Wilton lay slumped over the control panel. His tiny ship, unguided, hurtled into the void.

LIEUTENANT SAM WILTON came to with the illusion of being torn to shreds. His head pounded like a rhythmic trip-hammer. He groaned

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as memory slowly flooded back.

The Venusian blockade . . . the Earthguard . . . General Galway . . . Mona . . . and then the numbing paralysis when everything went black.

Wilton struggled painfully to his feet. He glanced at the control panel. Good Lord! He had been unconscious for three hours! And all the while the little ship had been hurtling through space at full power!

Anxiously Wilton corrected the erratic course of the little ship and headed for the Asteroid belt.

Another precious hour slipped by before the speedy vessel came in sight of the Earth fleet off Saturn. Wilton made contact.

"Calling Earthguard. Lieutenant Sam Wilton calling Earthguard. Urgent."

There was a click and then:

"Commander Fleming speaking. Go ahead, Lieutenant."

Wilton blurted out the details in short staccato sentences. "I've just come from Earth, sir. The Venusian fleet has mobilized and is attacking Luna. They've blanketed our televisors and we couldn't get through to you. I managed to slip through the blockade but was nipped by a paralysis beam. I've lost three hours getting here. General Galway's orders are that you return to Earth at once. It may be too late already. That is all, sir."

The set clicked off. Through the port viewplate, Wilton could see the huge Earth fleet mass into formation and accelerate toward Earth. In his heart there was a prayer. His receiver clicked:

"Commander Fleming speaking. You will report back to G.H.Q. Lieutenant. Your job is done."

Sam Wilton shot his little cruiser after the wake of the mighty armada. Time alone now stood in the balance.

WHEN the Earthguard reached Luna it was apparent they were too late. Wilton, looking through his viewplate, saw a meager group of Earth ships vainly attempting to attack the Moon. The Venusians had already captured Earth's greatest and most strongly fortified base! Sam Wilton's heart contracted.

He was too late. Cursing savagely he switched on the radio televisor. The Venusian blanket had been removed. It had served its purpose. He connected with General Galway.

"Lieutenant Wilton reporting, sir. The Earthguard has arrived."

General Galway bit out harshly. "I can see that. They've arrived all right—four hours too late! Land immediately, Lieutenant, and consider yourself under arrest!"

The set switched off with an abrupt click. Sam Wilton cursed vainly to himself. Hell! How could he explain what had happened? A lot of good it would do now—the damage was done. Wearily he turned his ship toward Earth.

* * *

A special detail was waiting for him when he landed. Courteously, but with the realization that he was under guard, he was taken to General Galway's headquarters. Mona was there.

"Well?" snapped General Galway, from behind his desk. "What is your explanation? We saw you break through the Venusian line. You should have been back with the fleet four hours ago. Because you weren't the enemy captured the Lunar forts without a struggle!"

Wilton looked helplessly about him. He knew he was responsible for what had happened, but he also knew he couldn't help it. Mona looked away.

"I—I'm sorry sir. But when I broke through the Venusian line they trained

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a paralysis beam on me—and I passed out. When I came to, three hours had passed. I headed right for the fleet. But I was too late." His voice trailed off. What was the use? The damage was done. Those words kept ringing in his brain.

Mona stepped beside him.

"I knew there was some reason Sam didn't come back, dad," she said defendingly. "Sam couldn't help being caught by the ray—why it's a miracle he even managed to break the blockade! As it is, at least we've got the fleet here."

General Galway turned his haggard eyes aside. The past few hours had wrought havoc on his nerves. His shoulders sagged and his hands lay limp upon the desk. He was at the end of his resources. He groaned:

"If only there was something we could do . . ."

Yes, if there was only something. Wilton ground his teeth in desperation. There must be a way out. There must be. His head rang with the thought. It was almost as if a vibration were repeating over and over again the same words. A vibration. . . . And then suddenly Sam Wilton straightened. A glint entered his eyes. By heaven! Something he had been trying to think of all day had come to the fore in his mind. It was wild, impossible, insane, but it was a thought! There was a tense eagerness in Sam Wilton's voice as he faced his superior.

"General Galway!"

The General looked up.

"Sir, we're in a bad fix—we all realize that. Something must be done and done quickly. The Venusians have the Moon, and if we don't stop them soon, they'll have Earth as well. Our fleet is about as good as a bunch of flyswatters when it comes to taking back the Lunar forts. Sir, I believe I've got an idea that might work. It's a slim chance, but anything is worth trying right now."

THE WEARINESS momentarily left General Galway's features. "Well? What is it? Speak up, man!"

Sam Wilton smiled. "I'm sorry, sir, but if I told you you'd think I were insane—and you might be right at that. But, are there any laboratory ships at G.H.Q.?"

General Galway frowned, "Yes. But why?"

"Well, sir," Wilton said anxiously, "I want to borrow one of them for a while. If the idea I've got works, I'll be back in a few hours. If not . . ."

General Galway's frown deepened. "Lieutenant, you are technically under arrest. By military regulations you should be interned as soon as you leave this office. Now you want the use of a laboratory ship, without telling for what purpose or end. Under ordinary circumstances I would laugh at such a request. But this, unfortunately is no ordinary circumstance. Earth is threatened. Threatened as she has never been before. Something must be done. You say you have a plan . . ." General Galway groaned inwardly. What to do?

"Let him try, dad! Give Sam a chance—after all, what can we lose?" Mona Galway slipped her arm through Sam Wilton's. General Galway looked up. Yes. What *could* they lose?

"Please, sir, I know it's asking a lot, but I only need a few hours. If I fail we won't be any worse off . . ." Sam Wilton's voice trailed off. General Galway came to an abrupt decision.

"All right, Lieutenant," he said hoarsely, "your arrest is suspended. There's a laboratory ship in the West hangars. I don't know what you've got on your mind, but I hope to God it succeeds."

Sam Wilton saluted. In his heart he

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said: "I hope to God it does too, sir." But when he spoke, the words were different. "It's got to be good, sir. And it will!"

A grim smile on his face, Sam Wilton turned and strode from the room.

THE HUGE bulk of an Earthguard laboratory ship stood out in space. Lieutenant Sam Wilton, at the controls, peered anxiously toward the Moon. What he saw was not a pleasant sight.

A huge fleet of Venusian battleships huddled on the Lunar surface, protected by the giant Lunar fortresses. The enemy fleet resembled tiers of waiting vultures. Waiting to swoop down upon their prey.

Around Luna, standing off at more than a thousand miles, was the helpless Earth fleet. Waiting. That was all they could do. To storm the Moon would mean instant disaster. Earth had fortified Luna against all attack as long as there was a fleet on its surface to help. There was a fleet there now. But it wasn't of Earth.

Sweat beaded Sam Wilton's brow. The moment was close at hand. Two hours had elapsed since he left General Galway at G.H.Q. on Earth. Two hours in which he had been exceedingly active. With each passing second now, his huge ship drew closer to the Moon.

And then the moment came. Lieut. Sam Wilton pressed a small button beside him. The hum of machinery rose from within the bowels of his ship. Suddenly something shot from its side. Sam watched as the sleek shape of an auxiliary unit forged ahead of the ship. He relaxed. It was now out of his hands . . .

* * *

Gery Vargh, Commander of the Venusian Campaign Fleet, sat in the control room of his flagship on the Lunar surface. His staff surrounded him, eagerly awaiting his orders. Low vibrations stirred the air of the control room. Vibrations that emanated from the Venusians themselves. It was a part of their being, vibrations. Low, dull, throbbing sounds.

Gery Vargh gazed on the vast fleet that would soon annihilate the forces of the Earth. This surprise attack had been masterly executed. His eyes strayed to the impregnable Lunar fortresses. The moment of victory was at hand. He reached out and switched on the televisor set. Every ship would be tuned in to receive final instructions. The Venusian Commander smiled to himself and prepared to speak the words that would launch death and destruction upon the helpless peoples of the Earth.

But Gery Vargh never spoke.

Out of the televisor came a sound. It was a series of sounds. It was a swelling, voluminous combination of sounds. Sounds that froze every Venusian rigid. They stared. They stared unseeing. The sounds grew.

It was a conglomeration of sound beyond the fringe of music. It was weird, ethereal, fascinating. The Venusians, their own vibrations dimmed in comparison, strained toward the sounds issuing from the televisor. Their faces became transfixed into masks of ecstasy. Hypnotic ecstasy that knew no bounds. There was eagerness in their eyes. Eagerness to possess that sound. Possess it above all else.

Faintly at first, but gradually, the sounds receded. The Venusian Commander, straining his every sense, gazed into the viewplate. He saw a tiny ship rocketing outward in space. And with that ship the sound followed. The Venusian Commander pushed to the controls of his flagship in a daze. There was a mechanical eagerness about him. There was ecstasy in his eyes . . .

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SAM WILTON watched from the control room of his ship. He watched as the little auxiliary ship rocketed off into space. Then he watched the surface of the Moon. His heart stood still for the space of a few seconds. Then suddenly he tensed.

A ship took off. It was the Flagship! Another followed. Another, and another. In the space of seconds the sky was filled with ships. They sped into space after the fleeting shape of the little dot that dwindled in the void. It was like a vast exodus, unseeing, uncaring, but spurred onward by some incomprehensible urge. Sam Wilton's heart leapt at the sight of it. The Venusian fleet! The entire fleet that had only a few moments before been about to tear down upon Earth—was gone! Gone into space . . .

* * *

General Richard Galway sat in his private office at G.H.Q. on Earth, lighting a cigar. Mona stood silently beside him. Lieutenant Sam Wilton, surrounded by jubilant officers, entered. There was momentary silence.

"Lieutenant," General Galway began, clearing his throat. "Needless to say what has happened is a miracle. That you are responsible for it cannot be denied. But what I can't understand is why you wanted a laboratory ship?"

Sam Wilton smiled. "There really isn't much to explain, sir. I just happened to remember something a few hours ago that I'd been trying to think of all day. If you recall, sir, our psychologists have written a great deal about the Venusian race. In particular their uncanny susceptibility to vibration. It seems that their life force is based on certain ranges of vibration in the lower half of the musical scale. And that tones and vibrations of the upper half affect them strangely, attracting them,* like moths to a flame.

"This led me to believe, sir, that if the vibrations moved, the Venusians would follow them blindly and unquestioningly. I merely constructed a crude musical vibration transmitter, adjusted it to transmit a continuous combination of sounds to which I knew the Venusians were susceptible, and mounted it in an auxiliary unit of the ship. Since the enemy had their televisor sets open to receive instructions, they were certain to receive the vibrations. They did. You know the rest for yourself. They went after that auxiliary ship like bears after honey. By now I'll wager they're near Arcturus and still going!"

The officers, grinning in admiration, pumped Sam's hand and departed. There was work to be done yet.

General Galway rose from behind his desk. "It begins to look like the wrong man's been sitting here, Wilton. Needless to say, I'm proud of what you've done. Everyone is. And now," General Galway frowned.

Sam had gone over to where Mona stood. He wasn't listening. General Galway coughed.

"You two could at least have waited until I left the room!" he remarked.

* It is a recognized scientific fact that certain ranges of musical tones, if repeated constantly under certain conditions, can, and do produce hypnosis. They dull, or deaden the brain reflexes and cause the senses to lax. A person under such a spell of hypnosis may be prompted to do things of which he is unaware, until the hypnotic effect is broken.—ED.

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rt from early Indo-European stock.

JOW on other planets fit for life we lack this long and dreadful history of death, survival d resistance against hundreds of probable dis-ses. New virus and microbe forms would be rtain to take their toll. Possibly no man of en a large expedition could survive all the po-ıtial diseases he would encounter. Certainly ere wouldn't be many of them who would care take the chance when they fully understood hat a chance it really was.

Now does this rule out migration to other plan-s, assuming that all the other limitations to ace travel can be overcome? Yes, as far as rmanent settlement is concerned. No, as far as ploratory trips are concerned.

Properly equipped scientific expeditions could plore the other planets if they could reach them fely. They would need to live perpetually in tificial, carefully-controlled atmospheres. They ould not dare risk breathing the atmospheres ey would find there, for air is laden with fast-ultiplying disease microbes. They would be able take samples and study laboratory cultures. hey would be able to inject guinea pigs to see hat effect such diseases might have. Possibly, rough years of laboratory study, they would be le to build up resistance treatments for most the diseases they would find there.

But first is that all-important proper equip-ent. The exploring scientists would have to e in completely air-conditioned vehicles. They ight not have to carry their own oxygen, but ey would have to have oxygen-manufacturing uipment. The vehicles would have to be re-stant to radiation. They would have to be oled or warmed at will to keep temperatures ithin tolerable limits.

Short walking expeditions could be made from e central vehicle-laboratory by scientists wear-g insulated air-conditioned, ray-resistant suits. hey would be limited in their jaunts by the eight of the oxygen and other equipment they uld carry. The suits would have to be most refully examined and decontaminated when they turned to base headquarters. The scientists ould have to enter and leave their laboratories rough hygienic air-locks much more elaborately signed than those of a submarine.

The only exception to all these elaborate pre-cautions would be the existence of a habitable planet which is not inhabited. I assume this to be impossible and that every habitable planet has some form of life on it. I am convinced that among this life will be microscopic—or larger—forms which would bring deadly infections to men of Earth.

Life on Earth which causes disease in man takes at least four basic forms: microscopic animal microbes, microscopic plant forms, parasites and (if we may consider the last form to be alive) viruses. In addition, there are many substances which cause illness or poisoning. There are poisonous plants, such as poison oak and poison ivy, the mere touch of which causes severe eruptions. Many persons are sensitive to pollens and to dust. We are still susceptible, in other words, despite millions of years of exposure to such hazards and complex dangers.

What else, then, can man expect emerging upon a strange planet filled with strange life forms—entirely unlike anything upon earth? As on Earth, he might find plant life poisonous to the touch—but vastly more so because he had no resistance against it. He might find an atmosphere swarming with tiny parasites which would fall upon him as a rare and juicy prize. He might find plant pollens with the ability to crawl. What would that do to his hay fever? He might find an atmosphere filled with little animals which flew so fast and so blindly that he would find himself no better than a target—and a dead one at that.

We can speculate but of course we would not know what man really would find there. I have suggested only a few things which might be possible. My guess is that the reality would far surpass anything we could imagine.

For if life has evolved on other planets, it is a far different form from life on earth. It has to be. Its environment is certain to be different. Its atmospheres, temperatures, elements, radiation (which we know markedly modifies germ plasm), light, size, age, gravity attraction, would profoundly change even a form of life similar to that which originated on Earth. If we assume that life originates by a chance meeting of favorable chemicals at a critically favorable period, we can be pretty sure that life on other planets was different to start with. And we can also be pretty sure that some of these forms are intolerable to visitors from Earth.

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